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LIFE'S A CIRCUS

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SWING BOAT

LIFE'S A CIRCUS

by

ELEANOR SMITH

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

LONDON ◇ NEW YORK ◇ TORONTO

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TO MY MOTHER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. THE BEGINNING	3
2. AN INFANTILE MEDUSA	8
3. THE INVISIBLE DOG	16
4. THE WITCH OF CHARLTON	22
5. FINDING BORROW	28
6. MY FIRST GYPSIES	34
7. ROGUES AND VAGABONDS	41
8. BLENHEIM	47
9. BALLET AND BOXING	53
10. UNWILLINGLY TO SCHOOL	58
11. ENGLISH WITH TEARS	65
12. ON THE RUN	70
13. FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS	77
14. FINDING A FAMILY	82
15. THE MATRIARCH	87
16. INTERVAL FOR ROMANCE	93
17. THE FOREST OF SOIGNES	99
18. THE TENTS OF SHEM	107
19. CHAMBER OF HORRORS	112
20. WEEKLY GOSSIP	117
21. THE GREAT CARMO	122
22. RUSSIAN BALLET	128
23. "RED WAGON"	134
24. MY FATHER	139
25. GYPSIES IN A CAVE	148
26. BARCELONA AFTER DARK	154
27. ON THE TOBER	160
28. THE BIG TOP	166
29. THE GUV'NOR	172
30. TOGARE AND THE LIONS	178

CHAPTER	PAGE
31. THE TIGERS ESCAPE	183
32. CIRCUS RIDER	189
33. LATE NIGHT FINAL	197
34. KID SPIDER ARRIVES	205
35. KID SPIDER PROPOSES	211
36. BALKAN JOURNEY	217
37. THE DRUNKEN CONSUL	223
38. LIMEHOUSE BLUES	229
39. "BALLERINA"	235
40. TRAMP SHIP	245
41. FLAMENCO	251
42. QUEEN OF THE GYPSIES	257
43. MATADOR	263
44. REFUGEE TRAIN	270
45. A CASTLE IN SPAIN	276
46. THE GYPSIES COME TO STAY	282
47. OUR LADY OF HOPE	288

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

SWING BOAT	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<i>facing page</i>
WITH "SYLVIA"	12
BRACKLEY HORSE-SHOW	22
<i>From a painting by</i> ROBERT McCAMERON	84
WITH PAM AND FREDDIE ON THE YACHT "MAIRI"	108
WITH FREDDIE AT MADEIRA	118
SERGE LIFAR	130
OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	136
KING GEORGE V AND HIS MINISTERS	142
KING GEORGE VI (WHEN DUKE OF YORK) AT CHARLTON	146
TOGARE	184
WITH "RED WINE" AND FOAL	192
WITH "ROSY"	200
"LA PATRIE"	248
AS CAVALLINI IN "ROMANCE": <i>from a photograph by</i> <i>Cecil Beaton</i>	266
GYPSIES AT EPSOM	284

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PART I

★ 1 ★

THE BEGINNING

I WAS born dead.

Two doctors, that is to say, announced my death before they had the honour of announcing my birth; the nurse, from whom I heard this story, was furiously indignant; she prided herself upon never losing a baby. Meanwhile, my young mother was more dead than alive, and this alarming pair of doctors next proceeded into her room, intent upon saving her life. Oddly enough, in view of so many complications, they eventually succeeded.

During these awful moments the midwife was left alone with a bundle of black flesh—myself. She has since told me that although hopeless of my recovery—but openly defiant of the doctors—she massaged me with brandy. But I persisted in remaining a corpse, and since she herself had nothing to lose, she then began to slap me viciously. To her astonishment, after a long time, I moved, and uttered a faint cry.

She was divided between pride and dread. To this day she regards me as a changeling.

(She told me this story, by the way, during a performance of *Ballerina* at the theatre in Liverpool; consequently, whenever I think of my own peculiar start in life, I associate the story with sylphides, clad in white tarlatan, gliding romantically about the stage, and these visions get confused with the nurse's story, so that it is all somewhat puzzling.)

All I know is that they thought me dead, and my mother dying, but nobody has explained to me what my father was doing during this unfortunate moment in the history

of the Smiths. He was so much in love with my mother that he must have been as one demented, but I really cannot suppose that he was of any practical use. He was emotional to a degree; he had, as I was afterwards to learn, an almost animal dread of illness. I sympathize, because I have inherited this same horror from him.

I was born in Birkenhead, in a little, "cottagy" house, and although I was not, actually, the first-born, it affords me some comfort to think that the dark and agitated young man who was my father at least, on this ghastly night of my birth, when expelled from his own house, trod streets that were familiar to him.

He was exceedingly displeased, I afterwards learned, to hear that I was a daughter—he had set his heart on a son.

My mother, as I have said before, was very young, and when she recovered from the serious illness of my birth, she sent for "Buster."

Buster was my mother's Victorian Nanny. She had been the Nanny of my Aunt Agnes, my two uncles, my Aunt Joan, and of my mother. She was stout, imperious, and blunt. She still means so much to me that I can't write about her as gaily as I would wish. She died when I was about fourteen.

Buster remains the most dominating figure of my childhood. My brother, Freddie, was born shortly after me, and it seems like a minute, because I can remember nothing before his birth. Yet many things must have happened during this time to the Smith family, because Freddie wasn't born in Birkenhead, but in London, at Eccleston Square.

I have since learned that we moved to London simply because my father was a brilliant young man who gambled on his future. He was a natural spell-binder—dazzling and confident, and, if these qualities seem to me admirable, I have no praise great enough for his young wife, who, despite

her own father's warnings, persisted in following her husband's star.

I never knew my Grandfather Furneaux, but apparently he was bitterly opposed to my parents' marriage. He was a great scholar, and a sober enough figure ever to have involved himself in the gay, feckless history of the Severn family. F. E. Smith courted my mother when he was young and impoverished. People spoke of my father, even then, as a "coming man." Grandfather said, with a sigh, that these coming young men never arrived anywhere. It is sad to think that he died before my father ever became successful.

My father was a blood, at Oxford. He came of a provincial family; he had no money, only his scholarship, and he was soon entangled in debt. But he had charm. With his usual self-confidence he managed to settle his delicate finances. He sent for all his creditors, appealing to them with an eloquence they were unable to resist.

"Don't you understand that I'm a very remarkable young man? Soon I'll be able to pay you back . . . are you really unable to trust me?"

The result of this interview was that he escaped bankruptcy, mainly owing to the support he received from an Oxford tailor, whom he patronized to the day of his death. As children, we were brought up to revere the name of this tailor, who most certainly saved my father both from bankruptcy and expulsion.

My father came from a middle-class family in Birkenhead. He loved, afterwards, to exaggerate the miseries of his life, which was, actually, by no means wretched. His father died when he was sixteen, but, as far as I can make out, he lived until then in complete comfort. If one reminded him of this, he flew into a rage, but it is the truth. My father was proud of his gypsy grandmother, Bathsheba, but here again he fell foul of many of his relatives.

Only the other day, Clare Sheridan, the sculptor, said to me:

"How proud your father was of his gypsy blood! He would discuss it with me for hours!"

My father's father was a brilliant, eloquent creature. Resentful of family discipline, he ran away at the age of sixteen, and joined the army in India. He gave French lessons, I believe, to the children of officers. At least, when he returned home, he supported his family in a most comfortable style—they wintered, for instance, in Egypt, and when we teased my father about this—in view of his own gloomy, pauper stories, he pretended to frown, but really I think he enjoyed it.

My father's most enchanting quality was his love of young people. He was at his best with his children's friends, and yet, in a way, he was very bad for us. He would encourage us to argue with him and to be impudent, and then, suddenly, after some really appalling impertinence on our part, he would lose his temper, thundering upon us like Jove, so that we never quite knew where we were.

We were encouraged to come down after dinner, and to be cheeky before solemn statesmen, but if he was in a bad mood we were soon chased out of the room, and then there was a tearful flight to Buster, who remained indifferent to my father's moods. I really believe, in retrospect, that he was a little afraid of her; he always called her, formally, "Anne," and, so far as I can remember, she always scored off him, possibly because she persisted in referring to my mother as "Miss Margaret." Mrs. F. E. Smith was even then becoming exceedingly well known, but Buster never recognized this name. Like my late grandfather, I suppose, she continued to regard my father as a wild young adventurer, from whom the children must be protected.

In any case, I am convinced that my father was in awe of her.

We were indulged, as children.

I am thankful to say that there was no parental discipline to menace our home. Our parents were more like elder brother and sister than parents, and we were able to twist Buster round our little fingers.

We were never coerced—except when my father was in a temper—and we were seldom punished. At the same time, it is idle to deny that we were extremely naughty children.

Of course, we are a queer mixture. My father's middle-class Birkenhead blood was fused with that of the Devonshire Furneaux, a Norman family; they, in their turn, were fused with the Severns, that feckless family of brilliant painters. Joseph Severn's association with Keats is too well known to dwell on here; he was a painter, a Roman, and a faithful friend. He was, incidentally, my great-grandfather, and it amuses me to recollect that his contemporary, on my father's side of the family, was a coal-miner, a bare-fisted heavy-weight pugilist.

Joseph Severn's father was the first violin at Covent Garden. When young Joseph told his father that he was accompanying the dying Keats to Italy, this parent kicked him downstairs in a rage.

Somewhere, shortly afterwards, in the north of England, a young Smith was courting Bathsheba, a gypsy girl.

•

AN INFANTILE MEDUSA

I DO not remember much about our house at Eccleston Square. Only stupid things—the library fire smoked, there was a bearskin-rug in the library, and the children in the Square garden wouldn't play with us.

I don't really blame them—or their nurses.

We were, as I have said before, naughty children. That is to say that we were mischievous, and high-spirited. We were, on the other hand, extraordinarily truthful, because at that stage nobody had ever frightened us into telling lies. When "Pop," as we called my father, was angry with us, and stormed at us, we roared and howled, but there was never any question of lying. Buster we mastered, because she was as indulgent as—more than—a grandmother—and our own mother was, as I have said before, more like an elder sister. She told us thrilling stories, and what is more, being descended from the Severn painters, she illustrated the narratives dramatically.

My father, on the other hand, was less fortunate in his inventive efforts. He was particularly fond of harrowing our nerves with a saga called *Poor Little Blind Ellen*. I can remember listening, horrified, to my father's sinister recitations; for months and months, I endured, really appalled, this heroine's many vicissitudes. One day, however, after some particularly depressing adventure, I could stand it no longer, and burst into yells of dismay.

Buster appeared from nowhere, much annoyed. She asked me what was the matter.

I screamed hysterically—(none of us, for years, could pronounce the letter "h").

"I 'ates—oh! how I 'ates *Poor Little Blind Ellen!*"

With a look of disgust, my father left the room impetuously, and I could only feel that I had behaved with extreme discourtesy. But it was worth it; my dreams were no longer haunted with the frightful adventures of Blind Ellen. . . .

Worse, however, was to come.

A friend of our parents took us to Madame Tussaud's Waxworks. It was kind of him, but he little knew what he was doing. He was a robust, unimaginative type. He escorted us to the Hall of Kings, where we stared respectfully at the sad, waxen faces of ancient monarchs.

"Now," he said, "for the Horrors. . . ."

I can only suppose that Freddie was too young to know what he was seeing. He has, in any case, since denied any memory of this afternoon. For my part, I was more precocious. I shall never forget gazing at the trussed, blind-fold figure of a man about to be hanged. There was something helpless, animal, about this bundled figure that made me want to retch. At the time, I said nothing, and Freddie continued to romp happily.

That night I suffered agonies.

I shared the night nursery with Freddie and Buster, and I confided in neither one, but whenever I shut my eyes, I saw with an awful clarity the figure of that bound, blind-fold man. Inevitably, I began to scream in my sleep, but some extraordinary shyness prevented me from confiding in Buster.

In any case she would not have comforted me greatly. She often told us that, as a child, she had been present at the last public execution in England. This had been a pleasant enough story before my visit to the Waxworks; afterwards it made me shudder. Buster was much annoyed by the sudden failure of her most powerful narrative, and, as I say, I was quite incapable of confiding in her.

All I know is that every night when she turned out the

lights, and Freddie slept, I, when I closed my eyes, saw the ghastly figure of the man who was about to be hanged, and I was nearly sick.

It took me many years to get my revenge on Madame Tussaud's—that comes later—and I have never yet got over my original horror.

To-day, when I read that a murderer is about to be hanged on a certain date, I am unable to sleep the night before, and, if I do doze off, I wake apprehensively just before the fateful hour.

Stupid, if you like, but the moral is that one should never take children to the Chamber of Horrors. . . .

But to revert to Eccleston Square, and our social failure therein. I, at the age of four, had acquired a sinister reputation in a neighbouring plot—Warwick Square. My Grandmother Furneaux lived there, and my Grandmother Furneaux was a lady of great character.

The daughter of Joseph Severn, the little sister of Mary Severn, she had always been brought up abroad, with the result that she spoke French, Italian, and German better than she spoke her native language. She had an ironic sense of humour, and she was far too intolerant to endure indefinitely the animal spirits of her daughter Margaret's brats.

We went to tea with her every Sunday in Warwick Square, and after tea, on fine afternoons, we were sent to play in the Square garden across the road, for Grandmother's friends came in to see her on Sundays, and she soon decided that her drawing-room was more peaceful without us. Here, at a tender age, I strayed on to one of the flower-beds, and was loudly rebuked by the gardener. Children, like grown-ups, have bad moods, and I can only presume that I was involved in one that day. In any case, I still cannot bear to be shouted at. When reproved, therefore, I sat down in the middle of the flower-bed, and locked my arms round

the branches of a lilac-tree. When the gardener tried to carry me away, I kicked him in the stomach. I have no excuse for this behaviour, but I really cannot think that I inflicted any severe injury upon him. Unfortunately, this ugly little scene was witnessed by several people known to Grandmother Furneaux, with the result that an indignation meeting was held, and I was solemnly banned from Warwick Square gardens.

My grandmother was extremely annoyed, not only with me, but with her neighbours, whom she accused of making a mountain out of a molehill. She was, as I have said before, a woman of impetuous feelings—(she once stood up to hiss Irving because she said he was “ranting”)—and my childish escapade was magnified into a feud of Dreyfus proportions.

Worse, the tale of it spread into Eccleston Square, where I was soon regarded as a juvenile pariah. This was unfortunate for several reasons. It was Buster’s habit, while Freddie slept, to let me go alone into the gardens, where she naturally imagined that I was happily engaged in romping with the other children. My own shame prevented any confession of the truth, and, when questioned, I always replied that I had enjoyed myself enormously.

Actually, I have seldom been more forlorn. To this day I cannot smell the scent of bonfires burning in the London squares without remembering how often I hovered, disconsolate, scraping my feet on the gravel paths, watching other children run and shout and laugh and chase each other about the lawns. If it had not been for a watchful row of nurses and governesses I might have felt tempted to join the revels unasked, but I had by this time a profound suspicion of Authority. So I skulked about behind a neighbouring tree-trunk, watching with what I hoped was an expression of lofty contempt the antics of these foolish children.

To make matters worse, I would have given my soul to

know two of these same children. Why, I cannot now imagine, for they were both dull and plain. They were called Doris and Charlie, and they were about the same age as ourselves. They lived opposite to us, and I incessantly made up stories about them, their lives, their house, their nurse, and their food. They were pale and lanky, with projecting teeth. One day, when I was glowering behind my tree, Doris, scampering down the path, lost her hair-ribbon. She picked it up, and said:

"Your name's Eleanor, isn't it?"

"Yes. You're Doris, and your brother's Charlie."

"How do you know?"

"I heard the others calling you. My brother's named Freddie."

She said, adjusting her hair-ribbon:

"Is it true they won't let you into Warwick Square?"

"Yes," I said, with the recklessness of despair, "I kicked a gardener."

"How awful!"

My despair increased.

"I kicked him hard," I said.

"Doris! Doris!"

"That's Nanny," she said, and fled.

I remained, an infantile Medusa, scowling from behind my tree-trunk.

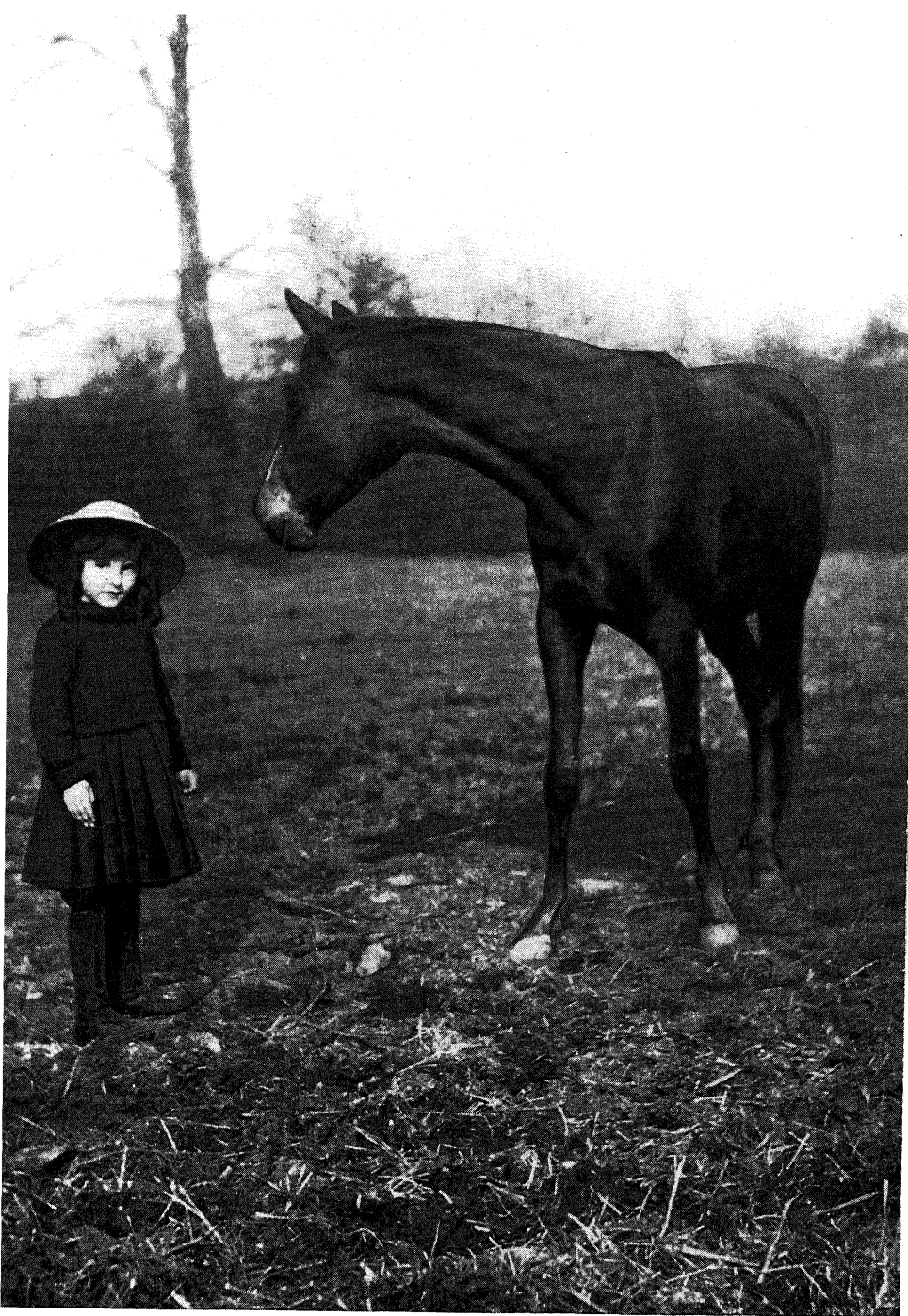
Worse was to come later; when Freddie required less sleep, and Buster came with us to the Gardens; it became impossible any longer to conceal the fact that I was a social out-cast. Much to my humiliation, Buster worked herself into a state of indignation directed against the other nurses.

"The idea! The very idea! Not good enough for them, I suppose! A lot we care, I must say!"

I interrupted this tirade.

"I do want to know Doris and Charlie," I said.

Buster continued to knit with furious speed.



WITH "SYLVIA"

"Doris and Charlie, indeed! Stuff and nonsense! Don't demean yourselves by so much as looking at them, either of you! Doris and Charlie! The idea!"

"But I do so want to know them, Buster."

"Then want must be your master. You've got Freddie to play with, haven't you?"

"I shall ask Mother," I threatened.

"And I shall have plenty to say to your mother myself about this day's work."

I don't know what she did say, but I do know that I nearly drove my mother crazy by beseeching her to ask Doris and Charlie to tea. After many fruitless days, during which I made an insufferable pest of myself, I achieved my point. Anything, my mother felt, for peace. She, accordingly, sat down to write to Doris's and Charlie's mother.

I was divided between the emotions of delight and terror.

"Of course," I said, "they won't be allowed to come here."

"Why on earth not?"

I was amazed at the denseness of grown-up people.

"But I've told you," I said, "they're *very* particular."

"Nonsense!" said my mother.

She proved to be right, and to my joy the mother of Doris and Charlie accepted the invitation.

It was winter, and at four o'clock the day was already finished. Freddie and I glued our faces to the nursery window-pane waiting, as I had so often imagined us waiting, for our guests to cross the Square garden.

"Now they're dressing," said I, "and soon they'll be coming downstairs. What do you think their nursery's like? Do you think they've got a rocking-horse like ours?"

"Can Charlie read?" Freddie asked, breathing on the pane.

"Of course he can. They're both awfully clever. I shouldn't think there's anything they can't do."

"Have they got a pony?"

"I expect they've got several ponies."

"Look!" Freddie exclaimed, "here they come!"

We watched, enraptured. Doris and Charlie, much bundled in Shetland shawls, were being shepherded across the Square by their dragon nurse.

"Look, Buster!" we said.

"Coddled up to the eyes!" Buster replied disdainfully.

The door-bell rang.

Two minutes afterwards Doris and Charlie were ushered into the nursery.

I do not quite recollect when the frightful truth began to dawn on me, but it was certainly before the end of tea. Doris and Charlie were not only silent, they were disgustingly genteel. They said "Pardon!" several times, which we had always been forbidden to do. They ate daintily, their eyes unswervingly fixed upon their plates. Buster and their nurse maintained a desultory conversation. Nobody else said anything until Freddie suddenly inquired:

"Have you got many ponies?"

"No," they both whispered.

"Have you got *any* pony?"

"No."

Their whisper was like the ghostly cheeping of long-dead white mice.

After tea, matters became, if anything, worse.

They played none of the games that we played, and their silence remained unbroken. (I have, in fact, often wondered whether they have since retired into Trappist religious houses.) Nor could I any longer pretend to myself that they were anything but exceedingly ugly.

They whispered occasionally to one another as they peered at picture-books, and Freddie and I played gloomily with our toy stable. Even the Nannies' conversation languished. A sort of ghastly constraint settled upon the party,

and I was never more pleased than to hear their nurse say:

"Half-past six already! Come along, Doris and Charlie—it's past your time."

In a few minutes we were alone in the nursery.

"All that fuss about nothing!" Buster muttered.

I was silent.

Freddie, who was too young to comprehend what had happened, suggested:

"Let's watch Doris and Charlie walk across the Square?"

"I'm putting the stable back."

"Couldn't so much as say boo to a goose," Buster commented.

I rushed out of the room in floods of tears.

For weeks afterwards when Freddie asked me to play "Doris and Charlie" I shook my head, pretending that I couldn't understand what he meant.

Fortunately, soon after this I was sent to a kindergarten, and although I was unlucky enough to be expelled during my first term, I hungered no longer for the children of Eccleston Square, for about this time we moved house.

We moved to Grosvenor Gardens.

THE INVISIBLE DOG

ABOUT this time I saw my first and only ghost. I was not afraid, as I should be now; on the contrary, I became before long much attached to the apparition.

One night I woke up to feel a weight on my feet. I put on the light, and saw a dog lying on the end of my bed. The dog was a scrubby white terrier with sandy patches; it stared at me, and I stared back at it. I felt no curiosity as to its presence on my bed, and I was very sleepy. I put out the light, and, when I woke again, in the morning, the dog had vanished. But it came back that same night and I stroked it. The next night it was there again, and I called it "Gyp," after a creation of that admirable writer, Mrs. Molesworth. I talked incessantly of "Gyp," but no one at first took any notice, it being supposed, I now imagine, that the animal was merely one of what Buster called my "fancies."

At first I supported this indifference with tolerable good-humour. Grown-ups were incalculable creatures. But one day all was changed. I was in the drawing-room with my mother and my grandmother, and the door was open. Suddenly Gyp trotted into the room. I had never before seen him in the daytime.

"There!" I said triumphantly, pointing at him.

"What?" asked my grandmother.

"Gyp! Look! You can't pretend he isn't real now."

There was a short silence.

I ran across to Gyp, stroking and petting him.

"Granny! Please!"

"I see nothing," my grandmother said dryly.

"Don't be so silly," said my mother.

I felt myself becoming cold with rage. (I had, as a child, an extremely violent temper, and when I lost it, which was often, I was sick and shaken for hours afterwards.) I stamped my foot.

"*Why* can't you see him? *Why?*"

"Eleanor," said my grandmother warningly, and, to my mother, "This child's imagination is going to get the better of her, unless something is done."

"It *isn't* imagination!" I screamed, dancing up and down with rage, and continuing to point dramatically at Gyp, who was scratching himself.

In the ensuing turmoil, during the course of which I was forcibly removed from the room, I lost sight of Gyp, which only increased my fury.

"You're a very naughty little girl indeed," Buster declared, ghoulishly.

"I'm not," I protested incoherently, "it's Granny—she's a liar!"

"And you shouldn't call your Granny names," said Buster mechanically.

I cast myself, despairing, upon the floor.

The next time that Gyp appeared, I maintained an air of sullen superiority.

"Gyp is here, now, in the room," I said, "and if you still pretend you can't see him, I just don't care."

Soon he came every day. He came out walks with us, trotting obediently beside the perambulator. When I threw stones for him he galloped after them. Frequently he jumped up, barking, scrabbling at my skirts, and then I would push him away, laughing.

"Get *down*, Gyp! Get down!"

He was more fun to play with than any one else, and soon I became reconciled to the fact that only I could see him. I was perfectly happy.

Not so Buster, who was inclined to superstition. She went to my mother, and said that I was giving her the creeps. Whereupon my long-suffering mother took me to a doctor. I had, of course, no suspicion as to the real reason of this visit, and the doctor and I understood one another perfectly.

"Get her a real dog," said he to my mother.

Shortly afterwards Sammy, a Welsh terrier, arrived in the nursery, and Gyp vanished. With a child's heartlessness I soon forgot him, for I was captivated by Sammy.

But to this day I can never quite understand the story of Gyp. He may have been only a figment of imagination, but the figment was oddly solid—for instance, he was heavier, when he lay at night on my feet, than Sammy, and it was always difficult for me to pick him up. I am still prepared to swear that he existed.

Later, at Charlton, I invented a playfellow, a little girl with the peculiar name of "Heon," and, although in many ways satisfactory, she lacked Gyp's vivid reality. That is to say, that although I almost believed in her, and even kidded myself that I could see her, with Gyp it had never been necessary to make an effort. He was *there*—rough white coat, sandy patches, cold black nose. He was as real as Sammy.

It is all rather odd.

I think I mentioned that my kindergarten career was a brief one. I cannot now remember for what particular misdemeanour I was expelled, but I do remember, very clearly, stealing a cigarette-card from another child's desk. The card depicted a salmon-trout, and I needed it to complete my own collection. This theft was never discovered, but for some time I brooded over my own wickedness, and I was never able to take any particular pleasure in the salmon-trout. I felt, vaguely, that I had done a frightful thing. I had, for the first time in my life, a guilty secret.

When I left the kindergarten I was fortunate enough to fall into the hands of a charming nursery governess named Miss Robinson. She much astonished my relations by declaring that I was "no trouble at all." The reason was that she knew how to manage children. I made rapid progress in reading and writing, for I was always, even when I was very small, irritated at not being able to spell out long words; already reading had become a passion.

I decided to write a story of my own, and eventually I succeeded. It was called *The Adventures of Eleanor and Freddie*. I was immensely proud of this creation and could hardly wait to show it to my father.

He read it carefully, and then remarked:

"Darling, there isn't very much *incident* in it, is there?"

I was shattered.

Shortly afterwards Miss Robinson left to be married. She was succeeded by a fantastic procession of French governesses. One of them was a delightful woman, but the others were not, I think, temperamentally suited to the training of high-spirited children. I can remember a series of rows, screams, yells, hysterics, and similar storms. Certainly we picked up French, which I suppose was our main objective, but I do not think we learned anything else, although we certainly acquired some odd Parisian oaths, and when, as soon happened, we were sent to morning-classes at a day-school in Westminster, these oaths were held against us, although we did not know at all what we were saying.

Actually, we were very happy at this new school. Freddie was taught to thread beads, and to make clay birds' nests. I listened to tales of Greek mythology, and was encouraged to write essays. I was blissfully happy.

I wrote a fairy play, which was marked "excellent." This, naturally, had never happened to me before. I am, on thinking it over, all the more surprised, because at this time, what with English lessons in the morning and French

lessons in the afternoon, we had evolved between us a curious pidgin language, half French, half English. I read the *Bibliothèque Rose* and Mrs. Molesworth with equal delight; *Sophie* and *Carrots* were equally popular.

All the same, I had written a fairy play and that play had been marked "excellent." For the first, and I hope the last time, my head was swelled by a favourable review, and I could hardly wait to tell my parents of my success.

I must frankly say that this wretched fairy play is the only piece of work with which, afterwards, I have myself been satisfied. I knew then—I was eight—that I was destined to be a writer. I thought myself a superb writer. I danced somewhere near the stars.

My mother was suitably encouraging.

As a reward, she took me to see Pavlova dance.

I had never before seen ballet. It made, or Pavlova made, an extraordinary impression upon my mind. I could not sleep that night. I no longer wished to be a writer, on the contrary, I was determined to be a dancer. I had the sense to keep, at least temporarily, this ambition from my family, but it was to make some trouble for me afterwards.

But my life was about to change.

Instead of telling Freddie stories, I slipped away from him and Buster to practise dancing in the attic. I found the grown-ups singularly tolerant; soon afterwards I discovered why.

My mother was having another baby.

We were sent away to Charlton, where I heard servants' gossip, and became melancholy, for I was certain that my mother would die. The facts of life were known to me, and I accepted them with simplicity; I had learned them from the stables and the farm. But Dickens frightened me; human mothers, I discovered, often died, in child-bed. Although I talked frankly of foals and chickens to the grooms and gardeners at Charlton, Buster's silence intimidated me, and I never discussed the matter with Freddie.

But I suffered agonies. I was so certain that my mother would die.

One day a telegram arrived for Buster. It was from Aunt Joan.

It said :

"Tell children baby sister born to-day. Splendid child."

"There!" said Buster, wiping her glasses.

I stammered :

"Is Mother all right? Is she all right?"

"Bless the child! Of course she's all right!"

"She isn't going to die?"

"Going to die! The very idea!"

"That's all right, then," I sighed. I had even forgotten Pavlova and the ballet. The War had begun, but none of us were thinking about it.

I do not remember very much about the War, but I shall always remember, with extraordinary clearness, the birth of my sister Pam.

THE WITCH OF CHARLTON

WE thought her a funny little monkey, when at last we were allowed to see her. She had long black hair tied back with a pink ribbon. I was covered with confusion because I had written my mother an enthusiastic letter telling her how much I wished that Pam had been "tripolets," and my father, who was in high spirits, never stopped teasing me. Spelling was a mania with me. I resented spelling badly, even when I was a child, and in consequence I sulked.

But Freddie and I were soon sent back to Charlton.

We were completely happy.

Number 32 Grosvenor Gardens was a fine house for children. We had huge nurseries on the top floor and the finest banisters to slide down that children could desire. The kitchen—where we roller-skated—was a vast apartment, and the cook was our friend. The pantry—vaguely forbidden by Buster—was paradise, and the footmen comrades.

But Grosvenor Gardens, at its best, could never compare with Charlton. Charlton was a cottage, bought by my parents as a hunting-box. Soon it became two cottages joined together, and then three, and now it is a long low house, facing the village street, with a big wild garden behind, large stables, a swimming-pool, a fish-pond, and three tennis-courts.

At Charlton we ran wild, and we almost lived in the stables. We had a pony apiece: "Beauty" for me, and "Bobby" for Freddie. There were ten hunters belonging



BRACKLEY HORSE-SHOW

seldom looked back without seeing two small prone figures. He expected to see them, and so did the groom. Nobody thought twice about it. We were made to catch and climb on our ponies without help, while the others waited calmly for us at the top of the hill.

We ran wild at Charlton during the War. In theory, we were supposed to do lessons every morning with a young lady who came over from Brackley on a motor-bicycle to instruct us. Actually we spent most mornings hiding from her in the hay-loft. In the afternoons we dressed in Red Indian clothes, rode our ponies, camped out in the wood, birds'-nested, and paddled down the stream in search of crayfish.

We were sent up to London before my father went to France, and when we came back the stables were empty, except for our own ponies. The horses had been sold to the army, and the grooms had enlisted. Only Rainbow, the gardener, who was not strong, remained, and in a few months Rainbow, too, had gone.

I can remember two or three air-raids in London. One was at night, and my parents were entertaining guests at dinner. Buster, undaunted, marched down into the dining-room, Pam in her arms, Freddie and I, pyjama-clad, pushed in front of her. Majestically she deposited Pam on my mother's lap and as majestically retired to seat herself in the depths of the cellar until all should be quiet.

The house at Grosvenor Gardens had a huge basement, and sometimes, during raids, as many as thirty or forty people came in from the street to take shelter there. The story goes that Freddie, who had a toy bugle, saw fit, on one of these occasions, to practise the "All Clear" so successfully that these unfortunates went straight out into the streets again, only to be greeted by the worst explosion ever known. For my part, I can only hope that this story has been greatly exaggerated.

Another raid, an aeroplane raid, took place in daylight. My father took me on to the roof, when, in glittering sunshine, we stared at what appeared to be a flock of silver dragon-flies, darting and flashing in the distant sky.

My father watched, shading his eyes with his hand.

"I can only hope," he said, "that you will never see this again. That's why I want you to see it now. . . ."

When my father went out to France with the Indian troops, my mother gave over Grosvenor Gardens to the American Red Cross, and went to live in a tiny house nearby, while we were sent back to Charlton.

Buster had Pam to occupy her time, and Freddie and I were always escaping from the garden to roam the countryside with village children. They were stimulating companions, possibly because they were—by Buster—forbidden, although there were occasionally violent differences of opinion between us. One day, I remember, we found a thrush's nest with young birds in it, and a boy called Eli proceeded, quite wantonly, to kill the birds, by stamping them to death.

I flew into a murderous rage. I hit him in the mouth with a stone, and in a few moments we were rolling upon the grass in a death-grapple. I honestly wished to kill the boy, and I am quite certain that he wanted to kill me. There is always something fierce and elemental about a fight that starts in hatred, even if it is only a children's fight. I know that our desperate battle frightened our companions, for they took to their heels and fled. We were left alone, panting, clawing, kicking, writhing.

Fortunately, on their flight down the lane leading to the village, the children encountered a woman who lived nearby, and she came bustling down the field to see what had happened. With some difficulty she succeeded in separating us. We must have looked a pretty sight, but I did not care, because for once I was conscious of being supremely in the

right. When the intervener saw the dead birds, she boxed Eli's ears. I turned and fled. As I ran down the side of the hedge I could hear him blubbing, and I was conscious of a savage exultation.

Eli is now a plough-hand living in a village near Charlton. Sometimes he bicycles over to see his mother, and then I see him in the street. He touches his forelock respectfully and I reply:

"Good afternoon, Eli."

But we never converse. The memory of that wanton killing is still fresh in my mind.

Freddie's reputation, however, was at this time worse than mine. The unfortunate child was suddenly accused, for some unknown reason, of a series of appalling crimes. He was suspected of setting fire to the church in the next village, of pushing a cripple boy into a deep stream, and of teaching horrible language to a child he was already suspected of having turned into an idiot by forcing it to sit hatless in the sun! He was innocent of these crimes, but he had a powerful enemy in the village, and his reputation was soon that of a juvenile Heathcliff.

There was a witch at Charlton when we were little. The village children called her "Mrs. Pocky," and she lived in a disreputable hovel near a deserted farm down the road. The thatched roof was thick with stinging-nettles, and Mrs. Pocky herself wore the rags of a scarecrow, so I cannot really suppose the career of a sorceress to have been a profitable one, but she had a reputation for "ill-wishing," she was "witchen," and therefore, to all children, an object of thrill and awe. Furthermore, when annoyed—as she often was—she threw stones and cursed.

We spent contented hours hiding behind the stinging-nettles, from which point of vantage we hoped either to see her stirring evil potions, or to hear her reciting the Lord's Prayer backwards. In both respects we were doomed to

disappointment, but whenever she heard us whispering or giggling, she would dash towards us with remarkable agility, hurling stones and swearing hoarsely. She had the richest profane vocabulary of anyone I ever knew. She was a dirty old woman with a weather-beaten face and eyes like blackberries. She usually wore a red scarf knotted about her neck, and, looking back, I imagine that she possessed a strain of gypsy blood.

When her tormentors were safely out of her reach they retaliated by yelling:

“Witch! Witch!”

Waving her arms furiously, she would vanish once more into the tumbledown cottage.

Some time after this she left the village of Charlton.

Poor Mrs. Pocky! I often wonder what became of her. Wherever she went I imagine that her sinister reputation preceded her. She was the Witch of Endor, and she would never, on this earth, find peace. Perhaps, at some period of her life, she had told fortunes, or sold love-charms, or threatened a churlish neighbour's heifer. Not very serious crimes, but enough, in rural England, for ever to brand her as a pariah. Old superstitions die hard, and wherever Mrs. Pocky has wandered it is quite certain that she has never escaped from stones, and curses, and cries of “Witch! Witch!”

If it is any consolation to her, a hundred years ago she would have been drowned in the village duck-pond.

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FINDING BORROW

ONE day, in the library at Charlton, I made a tremendous discovery.

The library is a big room, oak-panelled, where its walls are not lined with books, with French windows overlooking a rose-garden. My parents let us read what we pleased, and on rainy days I was happy enough to wander from shelf to shelf, dipping into one book after another. In this way, at the age of nine, I stumbled upon Ibsen, and odd though I think it nowadays, at that age I found *The Wild Duck* and *A Doll's House* wildly exciting, although *Ghosts* defeated me, despite its fascinating title. I thought it cheating to write a play of this name and then to forget all mention of ghosts. Arnold Bennett's novel, of almost similar title, was more satisfactory, although I thought—and still think—the inscription he wrote inside my father's copy somewhat conceited.

He wrote:

"There is nothing wrong with this except that it is not a first edition."

Actually *The Ghost* is one of his least successful novels.

A veterinary manual in three volumes, *The Horse in Health and Disease* was another inexplicable favourite of mine, but I had many more normal preferences, including Harrison Ainsworth, Whyte-Melville, *Robbery Under Arms*, Dickens, *Vanity Fair*, Daudet, the Brontës, and *The Mill on the Floss*.

I must, however, have had most catholic tastes, for when I went upstairs to the nursery for supper, I read with equal enjoyment the works of Mrs. Molesworth, L. T. Meade,

Marryat, and that classic writer of children's stories—E. Nesbit. Mrs. Nesbit, by the way, involved me, later on, in much trouble, but she was well worth it. I would recommend all young writers to read her book, *The Enchanted Castle*, before they even think of writing. If they can achieve anything half as exquisitely beautiful as her Greek statues on the lake, or one quarter as sinister as her "Uglie-Wuglies," let them go ahead and try. For me she will always remain a great writer.

One day, when it was pouring with rain, I wandered into the library. Freddie, I knew, was playing marbles with the kitchenmaid. Buster was busy with Pam, who was supposed to be cutting teeth. The stables, as I have said, were empty, and there were no grooms with whom to play darts on a rainy afternoon. Everyone was at the War.

I opened the library door, and thought the room sad enough, and dark enough. I had been so much accustomed to find it filled with gay, grown-up people.

I stared out of the French windows, and saw a wall of rain, falling like steel rods, completely shutting out the rose-garden. Behind the roses was an apple-tree, where Freddie and I were wont to climb, whenever we felt religious. Here, in the branches of this tree we held a church of our own; one of us was the priest, and the other represented a critical congregation. The apple-tree, however, was not always a church; it was sometimes a pirate ship, and sometimes a settlement of pioneers attacked by redskins.

But on this particular day, I recollect, the apple-tree was half-veiled by the cold, steely rain. I was alone, and bored; I fiddled with the visitors' book and then turned round to stare at all the shelves of volumes that I had not read. The name of one of these books caught my eye; it had a curious title; the book was called *Lavengro*.

"Lavengro," I thought, "what a peculiar name!"

I pulled up the step-ladder, and began to read *Lavengro*.

I find it difficult, even now, to describe the extraordinary impression produced on me by this book. I have loved many books so much more, but I cannot recollect any book that has made upon me so peculiar an impression. I use the word deliberately; *Lavengro*—the reading of which was to change my entire life—strangely disturbed me, at the age of nine, and made me realize, beyond any doubt, that my existence would, in future, be somehow bound up with that of the Gypsy people.

I had never, until then, heard of the Romani language. In Borrow's book it was printed for me in black and white. It fascinated me in an extraordinary way. I was perplexed by this musical, broken language, but it held me captive. There was no question of "liking" *Lavengro* as I liked other books, or, as I liked, say, the Russian Ballet. This was something more primitive. I did not guess, then, that I, myself, had gypsy blood. I only knew that something I could not control had broken forth from reading a printed page, to spin me in a whirl of beautiful, half-lost words. It was not only the words, but the people themselves, who fascinated me, in this book. When I had finished it, I read *The Romany Rye* and *Romano Lavo-Lil*.

I was afraid, myself, of the excitement that these books aroused in me. I was, as I have said, only nine, but I knew perfectly well that Borrow's books had changed—for ever—my life, but I could not understand why.

When I read about Jasper Petulengro, and Ursula, and the Flaming Tinman, and Mrs. Herne, I knew somehow that, somewhere, I would find upon the road the prototypes of these same people. That was inevitable, but the idea did not entirely charm me. On the contrary, I was a little afraid. I shrank from meeting them. But I knew very well that, sooner or later, we were bound to meet.

I did not talk to anyone of Borrow's books, but I studied his Romani, which has since been proved to be somewhat

incorrect. I studied this language with a zeal that would doubtless have astonished my school-teachers. I do not think I ever wanted to learn it—it was just a destiny that I could not escape. I knew this, at the age of nine. That is why I say that *Lavengro* frightened me. It fascinated and frightened me at the same time, but I taught myself to speak “pogado chib” with fluency.

I could not know for certain, then, that Ursula would turn up to dance in London; that Mrs. Herne would become one of my best friends, in Seville, or that I would meet the Flaming Tinman at a Belgian fair.

But I knew that something inexplicable had flashed across my life, and never again, afterwards, could I take quite the same babyish interest in Red Indians, or cray-fishing, or picking blackberries.

Borrow had one effect on me—he made me grow up in a hurry.

I know, now, that if I had ever met George Borrow, I would have hated him. He was rude, insolent, and narrow-minded. His particular bigoted brand of Protestantism would suffice to irritate any normal person. It is difficult to discover what he was like as a boy, but as a middle-aged man he was extremely unlovable. He was too arrogant.

Nor is he now considered to have been a great linguist.

But one must give this gigantic devil his full due.

He was the first person to write about gypsies as human beings, and he was one of the first people to interest himself in their language. Furthermore, he made his gypsies live; they live to-day, dark and vital, and they will never die because he drew them as he saw them. He is the greatest Romani Rai of all; he is such a giant that he will always dwarf his followers.

His Romani may have been incorrect, and he was not an imaginative novelist, but he happened to be a genius. When he wrote about the gypsies, his pen must have been dipped

in magic ink, for, whenever one sees gypsies, one sees Borrow's gypsies, and therein lies his fascination.

He was an untidy writer, and he never made the best of his own creations. He wrote of a girl, "Leonora," and he finished with her history when she was twelve. He could have written a novel based on Leonora, but he did not choose to do so. What a novel that would have been, and what happened, one wonders, to Leonora in the end? I have tried myself to identify her with Jasper Petulengro's adopted daughter "Miss Pinfold," but without, I must confess, much encouragement or support.*

Yet I am sure that after Mrs. Herne's ghastly death Jasper would never have neglected Leonora. Jasper, or Ambrose, was an honourable chieftain; Leonora had no home. She is one of the most vivid, one of the most evil gypsies in history; how much I would like to know her story!

To read Borrow's books is to throw open a door that leads straight into fresh air, towards a winding road, the wind on the heath, a younger, sweeter, half-forgotten England. His gypsies, jockeys, pugilists, horse-copers, and tinkers wander the road in gaudy splendour; theirs is the bravado of all great vagrants; the road is their kingdom, and none dare put them off it. But already, while you read, before the caravan reaches the next turning, the light is surely dimmer; the raffish figures less distinct. For, in the distance, sounds a mighty, roaring clatter, and this is the rumble of the first train; the beginning of the decay of Borrow's England. That first train will soon be followed by the first policeman, by the first motor-car, by the first sanitary inspector, and then, in the end, Mr. Petulengro will be pushed off the road, that has for so many generations been his home. They, the *gajos*, will try to put Mr. Petulengro

* Mr. Seton Dearden has recently identified "Leonora" as a girl named Joni Boss.

and his family into nasty little cottages, and, if they fail, it is not their fault.

Soon will come the dreadful day when Epsom Downs, on Derby Day, will be banned to Mr. Petulengro and his friends.

These smug *gajos*, with their love of drab, conventional things, cannot abide Mr. Petulengro, because he is independent and colourful and unlike them. He is a tiger, and they are house-dogs. Because he is different, they seek to destroy him.

That they have failed, after so many efforts, gives a vague idea of Mr. Petulengro's tenacity.

But Borrow's England has gone for ever.

It seems more remote, nowadays, than the Kingdom of King Arthur.

MY FIRST GYPSIES

IT may easily be imagined with what eagerness, after reading Borrow's books, I awaited my first gypsies. I was destined to wait many weeks, during the course of which I studied Romani diligently, and rode many miles abroad in search of the elusive tents of Egypt. I could, at that time, have been no very pleasant companion for Freddie; I never talked to him of my great discovery, and for the first time, so far as I remember, I deliberately kept a secret from my brother.

My father came home on leave, and we had an uproarious reunion. The War was nearly at an end, but we did not know it.

Freddie said to my father:

"Daddy, if I asked you for something I wanted awfully, would you give it to me?"

"I'd try to, darling. What do you want?"

Freddie declared, very earnestly.

"I want a slashing, dashing, crashing, *absolutely* quiet pony!"

He was never allowed to forget this request.

My father said to me:

"You're not very sociable . . . why do you always ride by yourself?"

I hesitated.

"I'm looking for something. When I find it, I'll tell you. That is, if you're still here, at Charlton."

But he wasn't. He and my mother went away almost immediately.

I began to grumble, and to become fretful. It seemed to

me utterly unreasonable that, when I wanted gypsies so much, they should be perverse enough entirely to disappear from the lanes near Charlton.

But one day, my informant, a village boy, summoned me by blowing a toy trumpet outside the window.

I ran across and put my head out.

"What is it, Jackie?"

The soft Oxfordshire voice brought good tidings.

"You wanted to know when the gyppos was here. Well, they'm camping out at Rush's Lane. . . ."

I ate my supper that night with *Romano Lavo-Lil* propped up in front of my baked apple.

The next morning I was awake at six o'clock. One question perplexed me. I did not know whether to ride or walk, to find my gypsies. They were two miles away, and certainly in *Romano Lavo-Lil*, Borrow's "Ryley Bosvil" rode straight through gypsy tents, scattering them, on his silver-shod horse, much to their awe and amazement. However, quite apart from my Welsh pony, "Beauty," not being silver-shod, it seemed to me that Ryley Bosvil's method of approaching his kinsmen was, to say the least of it, a little abrupt. It did not appear likely that his greeting was one in any way calculated to inspire affection in his savage brethren.

I quote Borrow:

"Mounted on a capital hunter, whenever he encountered a gypsy encampment, he would invariably dash through it, doing all the harm he could, to let the *juggals* (dogs) know that he was their King and had a right to do what he pleased with his own."

No.

I came to the definite conclusion that Ryley's methods were not to be mine. Quite apart from "Beauty's" plebeian shoes, I felt that I could scarcely describe her as a "capital hunter." She refused too often. Nor did I feel entirely confident as to the gypsies being willing to accept me as their

own. It would be nice, if they did, but after reading Maggie Tulliver's adventures, I was a little sceptical. I decided to walk.

I started forth soon after six, and, cutting across the fields, I arrived at the gypsy encampment before seven o'clock. It was a divine September morning. A blue haze hung over the distant elms of Rosamund's Bower, where rooks cawed faintly, their nests clustering like dark fruit in the branches of the tallest trees. Dew glittered like jewels upon grey, gauzy webs, the fields were thick with pearly clumps of mushrooms, and the brambles were heavy with ripe blackberries.

I was bare-legged, and soaked in dew. My face and hands were soon stained with blackberry-juice. I was a thin-legged, dark child, with untidy, curling hair; I must have looked like some brat left behind by these gypsies when I finally arrived at their encampment.

They appeared to be asleep.

They were camped in a green, overgrown lane fringed with sombre fir-woods. There were two gaudy, battered caravans, a low, smoked tent, and a sorry collection of hobbled mules and ponies. These animals, gaunt and shaggy, wrenched at the grass of the lane. The tent, the caravans, were shut and silent.

I sat down on a heap of stones to await events.

I do not think I am a very shy person. That is to say, that, on the rare occasions when I enter a crowded room, or restaurant, or ballroom, I am not particularly timid. But that day, sitting on the stones, waiting for these dark strangers, my heart beat fast. I was terrified.

I have already said that since reading Borrow, my passion for the gypsies had become so dominating that I could not myself understand it. I thought that it would be awful to fail with my first Romanis. I would never recover. So I waited, trembling.

After some interminable minutes one of the van doors opened, and a woman came out. She seemed middle-aged to me, and her skin was dark as a mulatto's. Her jetty hair hung over her brows, and she wore a shapeless garment of faded red. She spat, and began with deliberate movements to lay the fire. Then she perceived me, only to favour me with what I could scarcely misinterpret as a glance of almost malignant disapproval.

I smiled as winningly as I could, but she continued her work with such indifference that my opening speech stuck in my throat. I continued to watch her, my self-confidence ebbing. Shortly afterwards she was joined by two other women, one old, and witchy, the other young, round-faced, and roguish. They wore bright scarves, and curious gold and silver ornaments. As types, they were perfect, but as companions they left much to be desired. They sat about preparing a meal as though I were not there; whenever they stared at me, I smiled, but they took no notice.

Soon, when my depression was out of all proportion to my circumstances, two men appeared. They were dark, slouching, and unshaven. One wore a *diklo*, or scarf, of yellow, the other favoured geranium-red. They walked softly, moving their hips like ballet-dancers. My gypsies, although I did not know it, were Coppersmith gypsies. I only thought them more marvellous than I had ever imagined. I smiled—I was getting rather tired of smiling—at one of the men, and he grinned back, showing white, wolfish teeth.

I needed no further encouragement.

I sprang to my feet, and standing proudly upon my heap of stones, I began a passionate speech of welcome in Borrow's Anglo-Romani. All the gypsies immediately stopped doing whatever they had been doing to stare at me in frank—and I am now inclined to think—disgusted amazement. I must have been an odd sight. I had studied Romani for many

months—I had bottled up Romani inside me for so long, that the words bubbled out, and I could not speak fast enough. I laugh now when I think of the little thin, untidy child that I was, haranguing the gypsies so earnestly from a heap of stones; but at the time it was a matter of life and death to me to be liked by them.

That they were Coppersmiths, probably from Jugoslavia, and therefore scarcely conversant with English Romani, never once occurred to me. I told them that I loved them, and I meant it with all my heart.

When I could think of nothing more to say, I sprang down from the stones and approached them confidently. The two men, who were by this time roaring with laughter, now addressed me in a strange, outlandish Romani, a Romani that I had never encountered in the books of Borrow. It perplexed me, I think, but not so much as I appeared to perplex them, for they could not make me out at all. I continued to talk to them in Anglo-Romani.

I remember telling them that always, no matter what happened, wherever I found myself, I would always take the part of the Romani against the *gajo*. (I have incidentally tried to keep that promise.)

When at last I paused to draw breath my new friends told me in broken English that they were “foreign” gypsies. They said that they came from across the seas—from Roumania. I do not suspect that this was entirely true, but it served to break the ice. They then asked me if I was hungry. I was. They asked me to eat with them. I did.

I sat there in the lane, cross-legged, before the smoky fire, blissfully happy. I ate kipper and bread, and drank a cup of strong, milk-less tea. The women, by this time, had thawed. I told them that my name was Eleanor Petulengro, and I asked them theirs. As far as I remember they said their names were Mirco and Juan and Rosa and Maria and Dora. Knowing gypsies a little better now than

in those days, I am quite certain that they were lying. As Professor Starkie has remarked, nothing delights gypsies more than to tease and hoodwink their questioners. I now believe my Coppersmiths to have been members of the Stankovich tribes from near Chelmsford, but I have never been sure.

After breakfast, while the men were harnessing the horses, the woman called Dora produced from her van a cage containing a pair of love-birds. These birds, she said, could "pen dukkeripen." So they told my fortune, picking out for me a slip of paper on which was printed some rubbish or other. In return for the occult performance of the love-birds I gave my friend Dora a shilling which I had had the forethought to place beforehand in my pocket.

Then something exciting happened to me.

The gypsies were making their way towards Bicester, and they were uncertain of the road. They asked me if I could put them on their way. This way led through Charlton.

I stared at them, incredulous.

"Do you mean—can I ride to Charlton on the front of the caravan?"

"Sure, missy ride. . . ."

Delirious with excitement, I climbed up beside Juan, who was driving the first van, and off we started towards Charlton.

I suppose I have never known such ecstatic moments of happiness as those experienced that morning on the way home. There was I, perched up on the front of a gilded caravan, seated beside a darkly brooding gypsy, travelling the road with him, guiding him on his way, perhaps even a little patronizing in my manner, so much at ease was I in my superb position.

The wagon was filled with dead rabbits, and I think it also contained a baby or two. An ikon was nailed above the bunk. The love-birds were in the other van, and belonged, so to speak, to the vanguard of my procession.

I began to pray, as we drew near Charlton village:

"Please God, let everybody be in the street to see me arrive . . . please let Freddie be there, too. . . ."

Freddie wasn't there, and the little street was not abnormally crowded, but when the procession drew up with a flourish in front of my home I was grateful to observe that my arrival created a certain amount of comment.

"Be they a-stealing her?" I heard old Mrs. Blake ask hopefully.

"Wait!" I cried to the gypsies.

I darted in at the back-door, and, taking advantage of the servants' breakfast hour, ran into the larder, where I snatched a loaf and half a cold chicken.

I thrust my plunder into Juan's hands, and I was thanked effusively, by the other gypsies.

Then Juan touched the mules with his whip and the wagons went lurching off down the street.

I stood in the middle of the road.

The gypsies shouted after me, and waved their hands.

Then they turned a corner, and were gone.

I felt utterly desolate—I longed so much to travel with them.

I never saw them again.

Later, remembering Mr. Borrow, I took a writing-pad and pencil up to the nursery. It seemed to me of momentous importance that the visit of the Coppersmiths should be for ever recorded.

"What are you doing?" Freddie asked me.

"Writing a Paper," said I.

"What do you mean—writing a paper? You're writing on paper, you ass."

"You wouldn't understand," I replied, coldly.

ROGUES AND VAGABONDS

THERE were two periods of the year, during my childhood, that will always remain in my memory as times of ecstatic happiness. They were the summer holidays at Charlton, and the family Christmasses we spent at Blenheim Palace. I have, thank God, known much happiness since these days, but it has never given me the peace and security, combined with delight, that I knew as a child, and is happiness, obviously, of a different degree.

The summer holidays would have been a joy wherever they were spent, for the excellent reason that for more than two months we were liberated from our hated lessons. I can scarcely conceive of more unwilling students than Freddie and myself. Pam, of course, was still young enough to enjoy a freedom that was deeply and quite unjustifiably resented by both of us.

"Little," we would say to one another darkly, "little does that child realize how lucky she is. . . ."

But these jealousies were forgotten as we assembled at Marylebone Station with Buster and a new acquisition—a delightful nursery-maid, Alice, who had won our hearts for ever by her gift for story-telling. I remember that we were wont to travel with quantities of peculiar-looking luggage, a dog, a parrot, sandwiches, bars of chocolate, and a juvenile paper called *The Rainbow*, and I am heartily sorry for the unfortunates who shared our compartment.

I will take one of these holidays as being typical of many.

My father had recently been made Lord Chancellor, and

it seemed greatly to surprise officials at the House of Lords that a Lord Chancellor should be the father of a young family. When he took us down there, and allowed us to bounce up and down on the Woolsack to our hearts' content, I believe that the more senior officials recoiled as though at the spectacle of some fearful blasphemy, but we ourselves were deeply impressed.

Unfortunately, just before the holidays, we had succeeded in annoying my father.

Number 32 Grosvenor Gardens is a corner house in a busy neighbourhood, and the schoolroom was situated on the ground floor. So many people passed the schoolroom windows that Freddie and I decided it would be only kindness on our part to entertain them. Furthermore, it would be amusing, and we had already discovered that it is not always easy to combine altruism with entertainment.

So I slipped out of the front door, and hung a poster on the area railings.

"Free Punch and Judy show at 3 o'clock punctually."

We pushed the sofa up to the window, and made our preparations, secure in the knowledge that our parents and the butler were out, and Buster safely incarcerated in the nursery with Pam. We collected as many dolls as we could find, and were fortunate in the possession of a somewhat battered clown doll, destined to star as Punch himself. We put a frill round the neck of Sammy, the Welsh terrier, and sat him on the sofa-top, where he was in full view of our public. We then tied the dolls to our feet, and, lying backwards on the sofa, with our legs waving up at the window, were able to present what I maintain was a creditable and ingenious version of the puppet drama.

In any case, we attracted a considerable crowd, which was just about to be dispersed by a policeman when my father unfortunately chose this particular moment to enter his own house in the company of Lord Curzon of Kedleston.

They were not amused, and we were still beneath a cloud when we departed for Charlton.

I do not know what my father would have done had he discovered that, on Guy Fawkes Night, we kidnapped Pam from her bed, and, dressing her as a Guy (in one of my father's old ulsters and a cap), sat her in a chair out in the street, begging for pennies . . . this escapade was never discovered, but Pam was subsequently much annoyed whenever we pointed out to her that one old lady declared her to be the most realistic Guy she had ever seen; this episode was, however, true, and the old lady gave us a shilling. Pam, to this day, dislikes the story.

In any case, our spirits rose at the moment of departure for Charlton. We were met at the station by Mr. Durrant, our local grocer, who conducted his taxi with such speed that he was known, to the family, as "Reckless Reggie."

Once at Charlton we fled to the stables, to embrace our ponies. We could never comprehend how these animals existed in our absence, but they seemed to support it with equanimity.

We had a friend at Charlton. He was a flaxen-headed child named Francis, and his grandmother thought it would be "nice" if we played together. I am sorry to say that she changed her opinion before the end of the holidays.

Freddie and I adored the works of E. Nesbit, as I have said before, but Mrs. Nesbit involved us in a certain amount of trouble.

After reading one of her stories we erected a "Benevolent Bar" on the Brackley road, taking from the cellar a bottle of my father's best whisky. Unfortunately a tramp drank the whole bottle, subsequently "passing-out" in the ditch across the road, and although we offered sherbet and ginger-beer, nobody else seemed interested in our enterprise.

The Benevolent Bar was, in fact, a flop, and, deciding that Mrs. Nesbit had led us astray, we began to devour

Mark Twain with passionate interest. It became imperative, after reading *Tom Sawyer*, to find a haunted house; and we picked on a farm not far from Mrs. Pocky's cottage. When we could not discover any ghosts, we ourselves impersonated phantoms; we wore white sheets, and clanked, and groaned. Oddly enough, we deceived the village people; I surmise that Buster must have washed her hands of us.

In any case, we were completely happy.

We had, at that time, a passion for performing plays. Freddie and I once—in dark December—presented the *Midsummer Night's Dream* in a frozen hollow, to the village children. Our audience was restive and derisive. Oddly enough, this did not deter us, and we subsequently presented *Trilby* in a barn. The barn belonged to Rainbow, the gardener, and our friend; out of compliment to him, we called our enterprise the "Rainbow Theatre."

Freddie and I, and our friend, Baby Jungman, on this occasion doubled all the parts. Freddie, in jersey and beret, was "Little Billee," Baby, with her flaxen bob, a cadet's jacket, and a striped shirt, "Trilby"; while I, in Freddie's trousers, the butler's coat, and a beard of black darning-wool, revelled in the part of "Svengali."

Unfortunately, we were optimistic enough to charge a penny a head entrance, and, the day being Saturday, our audience was embellished by the presence of about twenty somewhat critical adults. All, however, might still have been well, had it not been for Freddie's lack of self-control.

There comes a moment in the play, *Trilby*, when the heroine, kicking off her slipper, says proudly:

"There's only one foot prettier than this in Paris, and"—kicking off the other slipper—"this is it."

When Baby said these triumphant lines, Freddie collapsed upon the floor in a fit of hysterical giggles, and the curtain, a screen, was immediately rung down, or rather pushed across the stage. He had no excuse; Baby's feet were not

large, but he ruined the play. The adult portion of our audience immediately took possession of the stage, whereupon they proceeded to conduct a competent sing-song of their own. For my part, I was deprived of Svengali's famous Morgue speech, and this I could never forget; I had a desperate battle with Freddie afterwards in the kitchen-garden.

I was so disgusted that I contemplated leaving the others to their childish games. I discovered a caravan belonging to some men accused of poaching; it was near a coppice of ill-fame, named "Cut-throat Corner," for the excellent reason that three suicides had been discovered in its lurid glades. I had saved my pocket-money, and hired the caravan for three nights, the men consenting to sleep at the "Rose and Crown," in the village.

I slept there once, with Sammy the dog, and I was not afraid.

My mother, however, discovered this adventure, and talked to me darkly of "dreadful things" that might have happened to me "if those men had come back." I knew perfectly well what she meant, having by this time read Compton Mackenzie's *Carnival*, and was much annoyed at being treated as though I were two years old.

Thwarted, I built a hut in the wood. This took me a long time, and it subsequently collapsed in a gale, but I loved it while it lasted. I slipped out, after bed-time, and camped there happily enough. I don't think anyone ever knew, except, possibly Rainbow, and Rainbow never told tales. To this day a fox barking, or the call of a screech-owl, reminds me of my hut, and, since it was indirectly inspired by Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* to this day remains one of my favourite books.

In August the local Flower Show was, to us, a treat that will not be easily forgotten. The lakes next door were illuminated with strings of brilliant fairy lanterns, and we were allowed to stay up until midnight, but, to me, most

exciting of all was the little fair pitched in a field next to our own garden. There were swing-boats, flying dizzily above the cedar-top; there was a merry-go-round with dappled, crested steeds, and there was, of course, a coco-nut-shy. Best of all, there were the fair people themselves. I would wander away to talk to them, and when they were friendly I was in paradise. If they were brusque, as was often the case, I would return sadly to the gardens next door, where fireworks blazed, reflected in the darkness of the lake, and people danced and sang upon the verdant lawns.

Years afterwards, I read in Mary Webb's *Gone to Earth* a description of a village Flower Show. It was so much like ours that reading it I became homesick. I do not think we have a flower show, nowadays, in our village; it has doubtless been superseded by a tennis tournament. Nor does May Day exist any more; nor Plough Monday. All those pleasant things are finished and forgotten and done with, with the consequence that every day rural England becomes a little drabber, a little more fitted as a background to the hideous cottages that defile its tranquil villages, and nobody seems to care.

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BLENHEIM

CHRISTMAS at Blenheim was something to be remembered all the year long.

The late Duke of Marlborough entertained in a magnificent fashion. Not only was it his custom to invite twenty or thirty of his friends, but he invited also his friends' children, his friends' horses, and his friends' children's ponies. We always considered that it was most forgiving of him to regard my father as a friend at all, for we had been brought up on the story of how, when my father was an undergraduate attending the Duke's twenty-first birthday ball, he stole one of the famous grey hunters and, harnessing it to a hansom cab, galloped it back to Oxford with catastrophic results. Later on, when camping-out with the Oxfordshire Yeomanry he "borrowed" one of Colonel F. H. Cripps's hunters with the object of competing in some species of midnight steeplechase, and galloped the animal over a stone-quarry. Both the Duke, as I have said, and Colonel Cripps remained his friends. I consider their behaviour angelic.

Blenheim, that golden Italian palace situated so majestically in greenly rolling English countryside, was like heaven to the children who played and shouted and laughed there each year for ten enchanted days.

There were flocks of children—Churchills, Guests, Grenfells, and Duffs. There were, less fortunately, flocks of nurses and governesses, whose presence, in my own opinion, did little to enliven a company that would, in their absence, doubtless have shown itself even more carefree. Once more

Freddie and myself were to experience the bitterness of being regarded by these persons as children of the devil, although when I reflect that my young companions of those days were to develop into such ebullient characters as Randolph Churchill and his sisters, his cousin John, and Sir Michael Duff Assheton-Smith, I cannot but think that they were well able to look after themselves.

In any case, the children enjoyed a Christmas freedom of almost unbridled licence, although I recall a considerable amount of unpleasantness caused by a free fight in the school-room, during the course of which Blandford, the present Duke, and his brother, Ivor Churchill, so far forgot themselves as to pelt the infuriated governesses with scones and cakes; they were much senior to us, and had indeed only visited the schoolroom out of condescension; they were Etonians, and gods, to us. This did not prevent their father from sending them supperless to bed, and at the time we wondered how he dared . . . it seemed sacrilege.

Between tea and dinner the children played games in the huge hall. Sometimes my father, Mr. Winston Churchill, and his brother, "Jack," came to play with us, and then we played a game called French and English. But they took a passionate interest in this game, and played so roughly that they soon scattered the children, conducting some violent struggle of their own that resembled nothing so much as American football. Bruised and forgotten, we slipped away to the Long Library, that was scented with lilies, and sweet with the music played on the famous organ by Mr. Perkins, the Duke's organist, who was gentle with children, and who allowed us to sit beside him as he played. I think we were always well behaved in the Long Library. Sometimes we curled ourselves up on the white bearskin rugs, listening to Mr. Perkins in a sort of blissful dream. At the far end of the library—nearly a mile away, it seemed to us—our elders discussed politics, and paid no attention to

the organ, but I don't think that Mr. Perkins cared very much. He was quite happy, playing to himself. Most of all he enjoyed playing Bach Fugues.

When we felt particularly daring, we played hide-and-seek—in pitch darkness—in the state rooms. One day one of us knocked down a valuable screen, and this pastime was immediately forbidden by our long-suffering host. It did not matter; Blenheim was so exciting that no child could be dull there for five minutes. I recollect a cupboard, or closet, off the hall, that was empty save for a dummy dressed in armour, and this dummy stood stiffly, as though listening, as though waiting for those who dared to intrude upon its watchfulness. We called it the Wicked Knight, and it became a point of honour for each child, at some period during the holiday, to shut itself alone for five minutes with the Wicked Knight. The terror of this vigil is not easily forgotten. Impossible not to suppose, that, in the darkness, the figure moved, stretching, so to speak, its armour creaking; impossible not to believe that, beneath the vizor, eyes glittered, the eyes of one resentful of impudent children, eager to punish their familiarity. I do not know whether the Wicked Knight is still at Blenheim, but I could not bear to think it still goes on without him.

Christmas Day itself was, of course, a mighty feast. Late dinner for the children, snapdragon, crackers, paper caps, charades, and hide-and-seek.

Boxing Day usually meant a paper-chase on horses. We took part, on our ponies, but we were left far behind; the actual chase was conducted by the fathers of the party, and they rode and betted like Regency bucks. On one occasion, when my father was the hare, the Duke pressed so hot on his heels, chasing him to the last gate, that my father, taking a chance, slammed it in his face, spurring his own horse home. The Duke was so much annoyed that they did not speak for several days.

I was delighted, and proud, when I was allowed by my mother to ride her Arab pony in one of these paper-chases. Unfortunately for me, the Arab lay down in a stream, and, by the time I got home, the paper-chase was finished and forgotten.

My father, at that time, bought a beautiful-looking grey pony, which he allowed me, as a treat, to ride. He was trying to sell it, and he decided that he could dispose of it to a certain press-lord. I loved this animal, and could not bear the idea of parting with it. One day, the press-lord rode the pony, and was bucked off in a muddy gate. He was intensely annoyed, and the deal terminated abruptly. The grey pony stayed with us, to my joy, for many years. He had no name; he was always referred to as The Grey Pony. He must have had plenty of personality—so coolly to disdain the power of the press.

One day, at Blenheim, a housemaid went mad. She ran through the state rooms, screaming, stalked by grim, powder-headed footmen. It was just before dinner. Her screams rang through the vast rooms, and they were so terrible that I will never forget them. They reminded me of a hare's screams. Finally, she ran to the furthest state room, and there, in the darkness, she was cornered. Four footmen carried her away; she attacked them furiously, and the powder flew from their hair like clouds of snow. They bore her across the huge hall through green baize doors, behind which her anguished cries were no longer heard. That same night she was removed to a lunatic asylum. It was a horrible episode, and one that I never forgot. It became part and parcel of my night terrors; on a par with the Chamber of Horrors execution scene.

One winter when I was at Blenheim the great lake froze. None of us had skates, and so, with what I consider admirable enterprise, I walked into Woodstock, where, at a public-house called "The Adam and Eve," I hired a pony-trap

and drove into Oxford to buy some skates. This episode, strangely enough, was afterwards held up against me by the governesses and nurses of my friends. It was thought an "odd thing for a child to do." I shall never know why.

Night skating on Blenheim lake was a sight of great beauty. I only saw it once, but I will never forget it. The lake itself seemed as wide as the sea, and moonlight was reflected palely in the darkness of the ice. Torches glared; lanterns darted with the swiftness of fireflies. The clash of skates tinkled as crisply as sleigh-bells, and the dark figures of the skaters flashed like tiny dolls across the illuminated ice.

It was impossible, in this frost, to take the horses out on the roads. Every day, for several hours, they were exercised in the riding-school. Solemnly, muffled in many rugs, they walked round and round this constricted space, and their breath clouded the steel-cold air. For some days after the thaw, they were tiresome to ride. They were so fresh that they were ready to jump out of their own skins.

It was my father's genial habit frequently to smuggle three or four horses into the Duke's stables without asking his host's permission. Sometimes, at Whitsun, he, my mother, myself, and a groom would ride the fifteen miles from Charlton to Blenheim. We would cautiously approach the stables, and once the horses were safely concealed, my father would then proceed to the strategy of our own entrance.

"Go up the back way," he would whisper, "and change out of those riding things. Come down to tea in dresses, and Sunny will never be any wiser. . . ."

This ruse was invariably discovered within two days.

"Whose are all these damned horses?" the Duke would demand of his stud-groom.

"Lord Birkenhead's, your Grace."

"Lord Birkenhead's? I never heard of such confounded impudence! How long have they been here, eating their

heads off at my expense? Do you hear? How long have they been here?"

The wretched stud-groom would mutter something about a couple of nights, and then the Duke would return storming to the house. But somehow, fortunately for the Smith family, his anger somehow evaporated on the way, and he usually ended up by thinking the affair a good joke.

"You're a damned scoundrel, F. E., a damned, horse-thieving scoundrel of a gypsy!"

And then he would burst out laughing.

What a charming creature he was; slight and frail-looking, with beautiful, formal manners. He was, too, deeply religious; inclined to the mystical; abominably treated by his own church, he at length found peace and consolation in the Catholic religion.

He was a very brave man.

BALLET AND BOXING

ONE night my father took Freddie and myself to a fight at the Albert Hall. Through some mishap as regards tickets, there was only one seat vacant for us both, and that was next to Steve Donoghue's. Steve was deputed to look after us, and he must have had a charming evening, for, so far as I can remember, Freddie sat on his knee, and he could scarcely have seen as much as he wanted, which was unfortunate, for that night Carpentier was fighting.

The evening, however, made a deep impression upon us both; we have been fight "fans" ever since. I have seen Dempsey fight, I have seen Tunney, Baer, Carnera, Farr, Petersen, Harvey, Boon, and many others. I have met and known a number of boxers. When I wrote a book called *The Spanish House*, I found that knowledge to be of the greatest practical use. Nowadays, when I go to fights, and when I see men and women dressed at the ringside as though for a ball, it seems strange to me that George Borrow should have shocked so many people by writing enthusiastically of the "Bruisers of England." In those days it would have been unheard of for a woman to be present at what was called a "mill." Perhaps it was as well; it makes me ashamed of my sex when, at fights, I hear silly women screaming "Kill him! Kill him!"

Meanwhile, I fell madly in love with Carpentier, and never rested until I had been introduced to the hero.

My father said to him:

"What would you do if you were in, say, some crowded

tram, and a drunken man, not knowing who you were, tried to pick a fight with you?"

The French champion reflected a moment, and then said :

"I should say, *si vous voulez, allons, mais . . . je suis Carpentier!*"

But even Carpentier did not influence all my mind, at this period.

I had seen Pavlova dance twice since that first marvellous occasion, and in response to passionate entreaties, I was finally allowed to study ballet three afternoons a week. My friends Zita and Baby were my companions, or rather Zita was, her mother also having ambitions for her to become a budding Pavlova. The unfortunate Baby was made to join the classes rather more to keep her out of mischief than for any other reason. She hated the long, tiring hours at the bar, and disliked our strict teacher with her sarcastic tongue; to this day, when I think of Baby studying ballet, I feel a pang of pity I might well have accorded her at the time. Zita and I, however, were ecstatically happy; we were proud, if our toes bled; when we were promoted to practice costumes of black tunics and black tights, our joy knew no bounds.

How many ghosts floated across the tarnished mirrors of that London dancing-school! There was the wraith of Taglioni, a sylphide in floating white; there was Elssler, with her castanets; a later phantom, Nijinsky, for ever the lost, wandering puppet of "Petroushka," and there was always, too, the phantom of a pathetic ideal, common to all the pupils, that one day one of them would cover our school with glory by suddenly bursting forth as a "prima ballerina assoluta"! Alas! for so many youthful ambitions; I cannot recollect one of those children, studying there, whose name has ever come even to be known as being associated, however humbly, with the ballet. . . .

Meanwhile my normal education was not neglected

despite these dreams of tarlatan and *tutus*. I was sent to an excellent day-school in Queen's Gate, where, as at the dancing-school, Zita and Baby were my companions, and there I was completely happy. Freddie, too, had been promoted from his kindergarten to the cherry-red cap of Mr. Gibbs's Academy for Young Gentlemen in Sloane Street. When we studied ballet, he played football. Already subtly, without either of us realizing what was happening, our childhood friendship was on its wane. Freddie knew no more about *entrechats* than we knew of soccer; certainly he and I, and Zita, and Baby, spent Sundays together, but we did not see quite so much of Buster as before; we lived in the schoolroom, and she reigned in the nursery, where Pam—or so we considered—was the petted darling. I suppose we were slightly jealous of Pam, and I suppose we resented Buster's absorption in the child. In any case, Zita and Baby lived very near to us, and we were all as happy as puppies when we were together.

And I was really happy at my school. This was not a usual frame of mind with me, and I therefore take pleasure in recording it.

We were taught history and literature by a lady named Miss Spalding. I hear—and I hope it is true—that she is now Head of the same school, for there can certainly be no better school. History and literature, taught by her, were vivid, fascinating, and gripped the imagination. She made one regret the end of a lesson, and I have never known any other teacher of whom I could say so much. In my case, such success was surely remarkable, for my mind at that time was entirely concerned with the study of ballet, and I regarded any other learning as so much wasted time. I am ill-educated to-day; doubtless through no fault but mine; but all that I ever learned from school—with the exception of French—I learned at Queen's Gate.

I wish I could say that, in gratitude for such good teach-

ing, I behaved as a model pupil, but I am sorry to say that this was not the case.

I soon became exceedingly bored with the afternoon preparation we were supposed to do at school, and it was all too easy to find a way of evading it. Muttering, I invented an extra dancing lesson a week. So did Zita, so did Baby.

I can find no excuse for this conduct. I was perfectly happy at school. I returned home at night, where I saw my parents, Freddie, Buster, and Pam, the baby. I was so absorbed in studying to be a dancer that I had quite forgotten I had ever wanted to be a writer. I had many friends, and there was Charlton for holidays. I can only ascribe my own behaviour to that restlessness which has always been my curse. I enjoyed learning speeches from Shakespeare, and history had just begun to fascinate me. My rebelliousness was due to none of these things. It began on a spring day, when I was supposed to be studying arithmetic. Sunshine streamed through the windows, and figures baffled me as much then as they have ever since.

Quite suddenly I could no longer endure to sit still, beneath a roof, pretending to understand fractions. I thought I would go mad. When, at last, I deceitfully freed myself, I rode for hours on the top of a bus, and I remember that I sang with joy. I knew, then, that I liked freedom more than anything; more, even, than the dancing-school. Little did I know what was in store for me.

Meanwhile, at school, I received good marks for history and literature, and appalling marks for mathematics. But my dancing teacher spoke well of me, and Zita and I became more and more addicted to bus rides. Sometimes, surreptitiously we slipped for a short time into cinemas. Valentino became someone to die for. Little did I know that the storm-clouds were gathering.

"What have you been writing lately?" my father asked me one day.

"Nothing. You see, I'm going to be a dancer."

"You talk like a fool," said my father, with what I now see to have been extreme wisdom.

Freddie, at this time, was enduring troubles of his own. He had been persuaded to join the Wolf Cubs, and when dared to ring all the door-bells down Sloane Street, had, naturally, as a point of honour, done so, with the result that he was immediately expelled from his patrol. He took his disgrace badly.

On Saturday evenings we all met at Zita's and Baby's home in Chapel Street. There was a reason for this; Doris Keane lived next door, and if we were in time we watched through the window to see her drive to the theatre, where she was reviving *Romance*. This was always a great moment.

About this time I was taken to my first circus at Olympia. It excited me about as much as my first ballet, which is saying a lot, although I never deviated from what I thought then was my first love.

But the circus impressed me passionately.

I thought:

"If only I could ever meet these people, these trainers and clowns and acrobats—I don't think I'd very much mind if I died to-morrow!"

When I went to Charlton for the holidays I tried daily to stand up on "Beauty's" back and I remember some unpleasant falls.

The trouble with me then was that I had so many interests—none of them scholastic.

A rude awakening was in store for me.

UNWILLINGLY TO SCHOOL

SO far as I can remember, the trouble started by my patronage of that admirable institution, the Theatrical Garden Party.

I ran away to attend this function with some other girls, and unluckily we were discovered. Discovered, too, were the "extra dancing lessons," those pleasant afternoons of buses, sweet-shops, cinemas, and stage-doors. I may say, in retrospect, that neither my own happiness, nor the excellent education I was receiving, was at this juncture taken into account. The only school that I ever enjoyed was Queen's Gate; I was removed from it before I was mature enough to benefit from its remarkable teaching.

Nor was I allowed any further to pursue my dancing lessons; I was no longer, I learned, to dream of the ballet and of ballerinas.

In fact, I was in disgrace, and so was Freddie, who had—by mistake—kicked a porter on the Underground. Nobody believes in children's mistakes, and the porter had not tried to make things any easier.

We learned, therefore, that we were both to be sent to boarding-schools.

Neither of us—however resentful—quite realized what was in store for us. We were so innocent that we supposed these establishments would be like our London schools, except that we would sleep there.

Nor did we realize that the bond of our childish friendship, the perfection of which had already been threatened, would finish surely, only to live again many years later,

when schools for both of us were finished and done with.

What harm the English create with their conventional passion for boarding-schools! Smugly, complacently, brothers and sisters are torn apart for as much as ten long years! The lovely, natural relationship of childhood is so soon spoiled; in no other country have I seen so many clumsy, wretched adolescents. Why it should be considered an admirable custom to segregate the sexes at this same difficult age is a mystery to me, and when I first went to live in Belgium, where it does not exist, I realized for the first time how awful is this English custom.

In London, Freddie, Zita, Baby, myself, and a friend of Freddie's called Vincent, had all been perfectly happy together. We had laughed a great deal, and if we were naughty, we were certainly never nasty. We did not know the meaning of the word. We were mischievous, high-spirited, and healthy. Above all we were healthy, although very few English school-mistresses—always excepting Miss Spalding—would ever believe, or rejoice, in such a state of affairs.

But I did not know this, nor did Freddie. We went like lambs to the slaughter.

Perhaps it is not quite correct to say that we went as lambs; we were, when put on trains, angry, apprehensive, and protesting. But we had no idea of the horrors the future held in store for us. We did not yet know what dark cards the grown-ups held in their sleeves. We still had, for instance, elementary definitions of justice.

And so we departed, not together, as we had always been—that would have appeared indecent. We were each sent on our separate ways. Our childhood was over and done with—we were, shamefully, of different sexes, and British schools can never forgive this particular sin.

I remember wearing the most dreadful clothes with a

feeling of irritable perplexity. My mother had dressed me always in simple, pinafore dresses. I was usually bare-headed, and most of the year I wore sandals. On grand occasions I sported socks, for my legs were still very childish, but now I wore stockings for the first time. The stockings were woollen, black, and ribbed. They made my legs itch. I also wore a hideous garment known as a gym-tunic, and on my head I wore a peculiarly offensive mushroom-shaped hat. The hat, alone, was enough to irk me. I never wore hats—I seldom wear hats nowadays. Furthermore, my father, in a playful moment, had recently shingled my hair with a pair of nail-scissors, so that the hat did not even fit me. This hat and the stockings were quite enough to make me feel uncomfortable and distressed before I ever boarded the train.

Added to which, Buster had wept over me, making me feel rather as though I had been condemned to death. Once again Freddie and I muttered darkly over Pam's good fortune. (She was, at that period, romping with a Teddy Bear.)

"That child," we sighed, "is the only one of us who has a good time. . . ."

Seen off by the butler, I mounted the train in a state of depression very foreign to my nature.

The compartment was filled with oafish-looking girls wearing the same appalling garments as myself. I hid behind the *Rainbow*, and never even imagined that my patronage of this paper would cause them to sneer at me for being "babyish." When one of the girls spoke to me civilly, I answered her politely. She embarked upon a pleasant enough conversation, during the course of which she was kind enough to describe the beauties of the woods encircling the school. Emboldened, I was imprudent enough to ask her whether gypsies ever encamped in these same woods.

"I hope not!" she shuddered. "Whatever would happen to the Guides?"

I suppose from that moment onwards I was branded as peculiar.

In any case, I saw that something had gone wrong, and so once more I concealed myself behind my *Rainbow*. When I heard giggling, I did not realize that this mirth was directed against myself. If they had challenged me openly, I might have defended the *Rainbow*—and my own reading—by glib, precocious talk of Ibsen and Borrow and Emily Brontë, but I am not quite sure; I think that I was still too simple. In my family we read always what we wanted, and nobody cared. Only my father resented my lack of enthusiasm regarding Sir Walter Scott. But he, far from disdaining the *Rainbow*, frequently inquired as to the recent doings of "Bonny Bluebell," and "Mrs. Bruin and her Boys." And so, for the time being, I was utterly unconscious of exciting ridicule.

The other girls soon asked me my name, age, etc., and I responded promptly. I had already attended three other schools, and I thought I knew the form. Never before, however, do I remember questions asked more crudely.

"Why did you want to know if gypsies camped in the woods?" asked one girl suspiciously.

"I'm learning their language."

"They haven't got a language."

"Yes they have," said I.

"Say some, then," suggested another girl.

I obliged.

"That's not a language—that gibberish," said the first girl.

"It's an Oriental language," I insisted.

"What else do you do besides speak gibberish and read the *Rainbow*?" next inquired my neighbour.

I considered. It began to dawn on me that I was scarcely making a favourable impression.

"The same sort of things that you do, I suppose," I hazarded.

"Can you play lacrosse?"

"No."

"Can you play cricket?"

"No."

It could not, I reflected, have been more hopeless. Not that there were not a number of things that I could do perfectly well, but prudence warned me to keep quiet. Not for nothing had I been to three other schools. Boastfulness was considered a crime, and for reasons that I have never discovered, the most popular persons were always those who went about with a meek, self-deprecating air. I dislike both extremes, but I prefer the braggart to the hypocrite.

Meanwhile the train was drawing up at a station, and I saw that we had reached our destination. With a sinking heart, I followed my companions from the train. Already, I felt I was branded as one who talked gibberish, read the *Rainbow*, and played no games. It was not an auspicious beginning.

At the station we were met by several mistresses, and one of them walked back to the school with another new girl and myself.

I cannot remember what this mistress looked like, but I do remember her conversation.

First of all, she made some observation to the effect that my father was a great man, to which I murmured a polite assent.

She then asked me if I was a Guide, or a Brownie—I really cannot recollect which. When I replied that I was not, she seemed shocked, and said that my father must think it "rather a pity." Miserable though I was, I managed to suppress a smile at this. I was then imprudent enough to relate the story of Freddie's downfall at the hands of the

Wolf Cubs, and the mistress nearly fainted. I might have been describing some story of infant sacrilege; I was really alarmed at the fearful effect of my little tale.

When we finally arrived at the school I was tired, miserable and apprehensive. I remember a basilisk supper in a large refectory, and then I was shown into a tiny, spotless cubicle. This apartment was frigid beyond belief; the narrow bed was icy white. Above it hung a long list of rules. There was a cupboard in the room, a chair, and a wash-stand. That was all.

The mistress showed me this cubicle, and then left me alone. At that moment I suffered a fit of panic; I endured an attack of claustrophobia that really frightened me. So, I supposed, did prisoners feel, on first being shown the cell where they must live indefinitely. My loathing of being "shut in" returned exaggerated a thousand-fold; I flung open the window, although I was shivering with cold, and found myself staring down into the dank darkness of a laurel shrubbery. Far away, I heard a cat screeching, and envied it, for the cat was free.

At this moment the door opened behind me, and I turned to see a bulky woman, dressed as a hospital nurse, who announced that she was the matron.

"But I'm not ill," I protested, hastily, "that is"—(I wished to be truthful)—"that is, not physically."

"I think," said the large woman, in oily, purring accents, "that you must be a very silly little girl. A very silly little girl indeed. Fancy leaning out of the window on such a cold night! Just fancy!"

I said nothing. I only wanted to be left in peace.

I could not, however, rid myself of this pest; she began to ask me all manner of extremely personal questions about my health, which was excellent; I replied sulkily, in monosyllables. She probably thought me as impertinent as I thought her; in any case, it seemed unlikely that friendship

was ever going to bud between us, and finally she left me alone.

I jumped into bed, pulled all the bedclothes over my head, and shivered for hours. I was awakened by a ghastly, clanging bell that nearly gave me a heart attack.

My first day at school loomed ominously before me.

Of my first school I can only recall the dimmest memories. My stay was a brief one and the first of a series of somewhat disastrous attempts to wean me from my ways at home.

I cannot remember how many attempts my despairing parents made to find a school where I would not be a misfit. One stands out more vividly than the rest, if only because my experiences there were more than usually unfortunate. Even now I cannot write of it with complete detachment though it has long since died a natural death and its hideous red-brick fabric has been turned to the uses of a Private Hotel.

ENGLISH WITH TEARS

I DO not want to be unfair about this English boarding-school. I was there for almost a year, and if I was miserably unhappy, it was probably to some degree my own fault. I was not made for school life; I was naturally rebellious; I was undisciplined and suspicious. At the same time, had my affections been won, I think that I would have been more docile. I had been, for instance, perfectly happy with teachers such as Miss Robinson and Miss Spalding. I suppose that I was happy with them not only because they interested me, but because they treated me as a human being. I was not accustomed to a system of being a prisoner perpetually supervised by female warders. This particular boarding-school approved these methods, recognizing no others.

I was still, when I arrived there, an active, inquisitive, healthy child. I was truthful, and affectionate. I had not been there more than one term when I became sly, deceitful, and sullen.

Whatever I did seemed to be wrong.

We did not lie in my family, because it had never occurred to us to do so. We were not afraid of our parents. However naughty we were, we trusted them, and they trusted us. The result of this upbringing was, that although we were seldom out of scrapes, we were always on good terms together. My father's rages were soon forgotten, and our relationship together was based, primarily, upon mutual affection.

At my day-school, I had been happy enough. I had always, for instance, been friendly and popular with the other

children, but nothing had ever prepared me for the companionship of fifty prigs. I would not have objected nearly so much if industry at lessons had been the aim of the establishment, but it wasn't.

Everything depended upon two things—games and Guides.

Nobody asked you if you wanted to be a Guide. I didn't—for the simple reason that I was anxious during this period of recreation, to learn Italian. This was thought unnatural, and I was forced to join an affiliation known as the Water Wagtail Patrol. Within a week, however, I was dismissed, in Dreyfus-like disgrace; I had been caught committing an unforgivable sin—powdering my nose. I was more or less “drummed-out” of the Water Wagtail Patrol, and this was one of the few happy days that I can remember, during this wretched period of my life.

I was left alone, then, while the Guides disappeared, stumping masterfully over the moorland horizon; I could read books, write stories, or commit poetry to memory. I was quite happy, then, on Saturday afternoons.

But I must have resembled an incarcerated tiger-cub.

This establishment of mine was supposed to be a luxury boarding-school. That is to say, that our parents paid through the nose, and the food was excellent. But we never had enough bedclothes in the winter, and we had only a duck-pond for swimming in the summer. We were occasionally allowed to play tennis, but there was no coach, and those who, like myself, disliked cricket and lacrosse, were considered not only futile, but peculiar.

I did not always dislike lacrosse, but I was particularly unlucky, during one encounter. I struck—entirely by accident—a prefect upon the head, and she at once fainted remaining unconscious for some twenty minutes. Nobody regretted this more than I, but I was that extraordinary child who spoke gypsy gibberish, and who enjoyed reading

queer books, and it was hinted that this accident was not really an accident at all.

Then there was the business of dancing-lessons.

I had looked forward to them eagerly enough, Heaven knows, but when I found myself confronting a herd of lumpish girls, scantily attired in butter-muslin, thundering barefooted about the gymnasium, I was so greatly surprised that I nearly fell flat on my face. The teacher, a vast woman in pince-nez, was also swathed in butter-muslin, and her feet were disfigured with bunions. So far as I can remember, she was telling the girls to pretend that they were gathering daffodils in a spring meadow.

I obstinately refused to take any part in these whimsicalities. When pressed, I said that I had a pain in my stomach. Soon afterwards I wrote to my mother demanding permission to give up dancing. She must have been astonished by this passionate request, but in the end I gained my point. If I hadn't, I would have thrown myself downstairs and deliberately tried to sprain my ankle, for nothing in the world would ever have induced me to join the butter-muslin revels.

Secretly I fretted. I knew that I could never be a dancer now, and though it may have been a foolish dream, it was one that I had cherished with all my heart and soul.

I found it impossible to take any interest in my lessons. I yawned through rigmaroles of dates and battles, imports, and exports. Shakespeare was stuffed down our throats with so much lack of imagination that he became a bore, and I think that is really the worst thing that they did to us. Somebody ought to prevent—by law—these school teachers from destroying so much beauty. Years later, when I was living in Belgium, I re-discovered Shakespeare for myself, but it took me many months to realize that, far from being a school task, he is one of the greatest enchantments of all.

If I kept a school, I would forbid the teaching of Shakes-

peare; I would keep him for a treat, but I would forbid him as a lesson.

Meanwhile I made a discovery that was one day to be of value. I decided that since I could never, now, become a dancer, I might as well return to my earlier love. That is to say that once more I decided to become a writer.

I disliked my lessons so much that instead of busying myself with preparing them, I wrote stories. I wrote about fifty stories while I was at the school, and they were very bad, but at least, however unconsciously, I was learning something. Meanwhile, in return for telling a neighbour stories, I discovered that she was willing to do my preparation for me.

Soon I discovered that the other girls enjoyed listening to stories, and, more important, that they were willing enough to do my preparation so long as I amused them during their own recreation. This fact was no sooner established than I abandoned all pretence of studying. I told these girls long serial tales that endured for several weeks; always, at vital moments, I left them, so to speak, suspended above some fearful precipice. I was sure, then, that they would deal with my arithmetic; they were so anxious to know what happened in the next instalment.

But I never showed them the secret stories that I was writing. I wrote three novels, while I was at school, and regarded the stories that I told in public as so many pot-boilers. Actually, there was not much to choose between them, for they were all disgraceful, but I rather fancied the novels at the time. So far as I can remember, they were deeply tragic, and most of them dealt with life in the circus, with which, at that time, I was not acquainted.

But I do not wonder that my tales were tragic, for I have seldom been more unhappy than at this school. Life was cold, ordered, frigid; every spontaneous emotion was regarded as vaguely reprehensible. To my childish mind the

rules seemed something akin to those of a female prison, and there was scarcely anything that we were allowed to do. I should have thought that our lives were dreary enough without the added gloom of being forced to make ourselves look as ugly as we possibly could, but even the fact that I had curly hair annoyed the matron, and she wasted much time that might have been more valuably employed by both of us in trying to comb it flat behind my ears. Once I asked her if she had ever read Charlotte Brontë's account of Cowan Bridge School in *Jane Eyre*, and she never forgave me. I returned her dislike with equal enthusiasm, but unfortunately her strategic position was always superior to my own.

The mistresses were hearty and unimaginative. The suppressed, crushing régime of the school turned most of the girls into meek prigs such as I never expected to encounter outside the pages of L. T. Meade, but there were one or two rebels, with whom I congregated. We were fond of discussing various methods of suicide, and while we were obviously prone to the usual exaggeration of adolescence, it cannot be denied that the life we were leading must have been unsympathetic in the extreme to have caused so much bewildered misery.

★ 12 ★

ON THE RUN

IT must not be thought that I suffered in silence. Every week I wrote despairing letters to both parents; when they came to visit me I smeared chalk on my face, and assured them that I was falling into a decline. Unfortunately, Freddie had rather spoiled my market.

He wrote:

“DEAR DADDY,

I hate this School. Tell Buster I am very homesick.

All we have had to eat for a long time is one of the master's pedigree Goats that died of influenza, and last night one boy beat another boy with chains for sneaking, but he hadn't. Please could you send me a little money?”

When I told my parents how unhappy I was they said that the house seemed comfortable and that the grounds looked very pleasant. They were in fact so unhelpful that I decided to take matters into my own hands and run away. I considered myself an expert, with more than one such adventure to my credit. Escapes from other schools had ended happily enough—with my being gently taken away altogether. I gave some thought to this plan, and when it was finally completed, I did not see how it could have been bettered.

One Saturday night, at about ten o'clock, when I knew the staff would probably be in their own quarters, I got out of bed and dressed myself without daring to put on the light. I put on a dark jersey, and a dark coat. I wore no hat, and although I would have liked, for purposes of disguise, to tie a coloured handkerchief round my head this

was not possible, for we were not allowed coloured handkerchiefs. Genteel authority pronounced them "vulgar." I had a few shillings that I had managed to conceal, for we were not allowed to have any money in our possession except the threepence doled out to us on Sunday mornings for the chapel collection. As we were never allowed out of the grounds, and as chocolate, magazines, and fruit were as strictly forbidden as would have been opium, the financial situation had hitherto been one of my minor worries, and the fact that we were made to give most of our pocket-money to missionaries had caused me, hitherto, only a faint annoyance.

Now I fingered my four shillings, and although they clinked reassuringly in my pocket—I need hardly add that handbags were also forbidden—I could have wished they had been eight, or even ten. It was quite a long way to London. But they were better than nothing.

Presently I opened my door, and perceiving that there were no signs of life, I emerged, tiptoed along the corridor, and incarcerated myself in the lavatory. From this window to a flat roof was a mere matter of a few feet, and a handy tree grew like a gnarled staircase against the wall below. It might have been designed for running away.

I let myself down upon the roof, and it seemed to me that the noise I made must awaken the dead. For some moments I lay curled up, expecting heads to be popped from every window; I was shivering, and my heart thumped painfully against my ribs. To my astonishment, nothing at all happened. I can only suppose that the over-exercised pupils slept, while the teachers continued their Saturday night drinking-party—(cocoa)—in another wing.

After a time I crawled cautiously across the roof and slid down the accommodating tree into the garden. Here I was not far from lighted windows, and by this time my nerves were jumping. I took to my heels and ran.

It was a cold, silvery night, and the sky was pierced with

stars. When I crossed the drive my feet crunched on the gravel, and I nearly had another heart attack. I was delighted to find myself on the grass near the tennis-courts. I looked back at the drive, and felt that I would always hate because of what it signified, the gloomy shapes of the oak trees with which it was fringed.

I knew that I must keep away from this drive not only because the gate was shut, and there were people in the lodge, but because the head-mistress might at that very moment be driving home from some lugubrious dinner-party or other. Incredible although it may seem, she was occasionally invited to clerical sprees in the neighbourhood. I suppose her pupils contributed so much money to foreign missions that once in a while the local ecclesiastics had to give her a break of some kind.

I turned down the rose-garden into a shrubbery that led towards my worst obstacle, the wall. There were bats in the shrubbery, and clinging objects like mouldering spiders' webs frequently brushed against my face, but, bad as the shrubbery was, it was far superior to my school cubicle, and this knowledge consoled me not a little as I thrust my way down the overgrown path. I had with me my most treasured possession, an electric-torch, but I did not dare to use it, for fear of the disagreeable gardener who lurked in the lodge, and who was as bad as any school-mistress.

At length I found my way to my objective—a broken place in the wall that ran round the garden. Thanks to the daily gymnastic lessons that played so important a part in our curriculum, I was more active than a restless, long-caged monkey, and the first part of the wall presented no particular difficulty—I scaled it almost airily.

It was only when I let myself drop down the other side that I suffered a slight reverse. It seemed to me, in the darkness, that I slithered for some seconds before falling at least ten feet into some species of dyke or ditch, the existence of

which I had unfortunately forgotten. The other day, driving past this wall, I marvelled at my own escape. Why I did not break both legs I do not know, but when I picked myself up I discovered that, with the exception of a few bruises and scratches, and a pair of stockings torn to ribbons, I was none the worse for my adventure.

Furthermore, I was on the Great North Road.

It was at this point in the evening that I first became aware of a feeling of terrified uncertainty, for my real difficulties lay ahead of me, and these were considerable. It had been my intention to beg a lift from the first passing motorist, and that, in theory, had seemed a trifle, but now that the time had come I became more and more reluctant to avail myself of what the Americans call a "hitch-hike."

Meanwhile, it was bitterly cold, and I began to walk dismally towards the nearest town. Several cars passed me, but I pretended not to see them. Quite apart from the complications of explaining why I wanted a lift to London, I was by this time beginning to visualize the welcome my father was likely to accord me on arrival. Pollyanna herself could scarcely have supposed that his greeting would be in any way a genial one, and I began to think it a pity that I had not done the thing properly, and gone off to join some desperate band of gypsies.

At this point in my meditations I arrived at a small, and rather sordid-looking wayside café. There was a large lorry parked outside, and inside it appeared to be empty except for a tired-looking man behind the counter.

I walked inside, and asked somewhat timidly for a cup of tea. Receiving it, I sat down at a little table, and then saw that I was not alone, as I had supposed. A fat, unshaven man sat opposite to me, gulping down tea from a saucer. He was the lorry driver, pausing for refreshment. Both men stared at me with so much astonishment that for the first time I became conscious of my own dishevelled

appearance. My hair was on end, my face was smeared with dirt, and my bleeding knees protruded from my stockings. A more obvious fugitive from justice can never have been beheld.

At last, after a prolonged scrutiny the lorry driver said:

"You 'aven't 'arf been and got yourself into a narsty pickle, 'ave you?"

Now, if in those days I had read and heard as much about lorry drivers as I have since, the chances are that I should have fled as though from a bogey. But I knew nothing of their so-called desperate life on the roads, of "jumping" lorries, or lorry girls, or any of the rest of the rigmarole. This man appeared to be sympathetic, and it was pleasant to hear a Cockney voice after the refined accents of school teachers.

"I had a fall," said I.

The lorry driver winked.

"On the run from school, eh?"

I was mortified, for I was under the impression that I looked quite grown-up—fifteen at least.

So I evaded the question by remarking, in what I hoped was a haughty voice:

"I'm on my way to London."

The waiter stared at me in a bored way, picking his teeth with a match, while the lorry driver observed:

"Won't 'arf catch it to-morrow, will you?"

I said nothing, but continued to drink my tea.

"Where's she from?" asked the lorry driver of the waiter.

"School quarter of a mile down the road," indifferently answered the waiter, jerking his thumb in the direction from which I had appeared.

Although I much disliked being discussed as though I did not exist, I found it difficult to protest for the simple reason that my adventure was rapidly dying on me. I was not even sure that I wanted to go to London any more.

"I got kids of my own," the lorry driver declared, fixing me with a menacing eye.

At this point I sneezed loudly.

"Two kids I got," continued the lorry driver, "boy and girl. Names of Eric and Maisie. About your age, my Maisie is, and wouldn't I 'arf warm 'er pants if I caught her on the run, same as you!"

I sneezed again, after which I demanded:

"Well, what *am* I to do? How can I climb up the wall again when I've just fallen all the way down it?"

"Aren't kids a shocking nuisance?" appealed the lorry driver of the waiter, and turning to me:

"Come on, and look smart! Blimey, I'll give you a leg-up the blarsted wall if that's all there is to stop you trampin' about the roads all night!"

"You're very kind indeed," said I to the lorry driver, not without a sensation of profound relief.

He was not so much a lorry driver as a Samaritan.

He kept his word. He half pushed, half dragged me onto the top of the wall, and as there was no drop on the other side, I was then in no fear of falling. He talked to me incessantly of Eric and Maisie and of his "old woman," nor would he take any money from me.

"I tell you I got kids of my own," he repeated aggressively.

When I tried to thank him, he would have none of it.

"Tata, and be a good girl," were his parting words, "I've got to beat it—I'm late."

If all lorry drivers are like him they must be a finer class of men than writers would have us suppose.

Once again I stumbled through the shrubbery, skirted the lawn, climbed the tree, and wriggled in through the lavatory window. If it had been fully closed, I should have been caught.

I was exhausted, and very cold. It was not yet half-past

twelve, but it seemed to me as though my adventures had lasted for an eternity. I had a cold the next morning, and remained in bed for two days. Fortunately nobody noticed my scarred knees.

I felt almost cheerful, despite the failure of my escape; the lorry driver was the first sympathetic grown-up person who had talked to me since first I came to school.

FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS

SOME time after I had recuperated from the adventure of the lorry driver, I described the experience to my few friends at the school. They would not believe me; they thought it was another of my tales.

But I did not care. My father, exasperated by my suicidal letters, at last gave his consent to my leaving the school, and nothing else mattered. I knew that I was to be sent to a French boarding-school, but I knew too, that nothing could be worse than my present life.

I did not mind that last summer term in England. Numbers of pupils went down with whooping-cough, and when I saw that they were not made to study, but were allowed to wander about the garden at their own sweet will, I whooped too—a great effort—and was soon sent to join them. We had our meals out of doors, and otherwise did as we pleased. It was a fair, dry summer. I wrote a novel of 70,000 words and read as many books as I wanted. It would have been pleasant enough had we been allowed clothes more attuned to the weather. But we were still swaddled in hideous garments of black serge; we wore stockings, and were crowned with a new horror—a straw object known as a “garden-hat.”

I was drunk with joy, the night that I left that school.

We spent the holidays on my father's motor yacht, the *Mairi*. We went to Holland, and then up the Rhine. My father said afterwards that he would never take his three children away again at the same time. I know what he meant. We were all writing books, and there was not very

much space on the *Mairi*. I was writing another novel, Freddie a sarcastic and impertinent diary of the trip, and Pam, who could scarcely hold a pencil, announced that she was engaged in writing, or rather printing, the story of her life. Naturally, since we were all working at the same table, we quarrelled incessantly, and tempers—including my father's temper—ran high. He was determined to break some record or other by arriving at Mainz with the least possible delay, and although it was exceedingly hot, he would not once stop to let us swim.

We were then wrecked near Dusseldorf by an incompetent pilot, who turned us turtle, and then indeed my father's temper was fearful to behold. The *Mairi* was wrecked several times, and why we were not all drowned I cannot now imagine, but at that time we seemed to take shipwrecks entirely as a matter of course.

In the autumn I was sent to a French school, where, although somewhat depressed, I was certainly not violently unhappy. At least serious attention was paid to study, and games were almost non-existent; what I lost on the roundabouts, for instance, I made up on the swings. The bath-water was always cold at this school; on winter mornings we were supposed to smash a film of ice before immersing ourselves. I don't think anyone ever did this. At any rate we were not turned out like so many sausages from a machine; you were allowed in France to have an opinion of your own, even if you were a "fillette." That was a treat in itself.

But unfortunately treats wear thin.

I really cannot remember what the trouble was this time, but there was some grievance or other, and I moved on again.

This time I was sent to another French school at Meudon. The school was kept by an English lady, and as schools go, it was a pleasant one. I enjoyed it. Sometimes, at night, the elder girls let me out of a window to buy chocolate and

cigarettes for them at a café across the road. We were allowed to wear our own clothes, and we were encouraged to make the best of ourselves. We learned cooking, and on Sunday nights they gave us *vin rosé* to drink at supper. Life was pleasant; we were treated indulgently, and I saw no reason why, this time, I should ever move on. Even the mistresses were sympathetic. It was all too good to be true.

It *was* too good to be true.

When my parents discovered that the majority of girls at this school were English, they thought that I must, by speaking a queer kind of French, be undoing the good of my more childish days. Furthermore, my father, as Lord Chancellor, had just paid a state visit to Brussels, to the President of the Court of Cassation, and he had there discovered that a certain Baron de Haulleville, living outside Brussels, would be glad to take me indefinitely in his care. I was apparently to become a paying-guest in the Baron's family, and I was to attend classes at a convent day-school in Brussels. In fact, once again I was to be moved on. I was still "on the run."

I protested vigorously, but nobody took any notice, and in June my father took me over to Paris, where he was to put me in the train for Brussels. I believe he had business in Paris; I cannot otherwise imagine why I was dispatched on such a round-about journey. I felt more cheerful in Paris; I dined with my father in the Bois and ate *fraises-de-bois*, coral-red, snowed-over with sugar. For two days I managed to forget that I was on my way to live indefinitely in the family of a Belgian Baron whom none of us had ever seen. I did, in fact, point out to my father that the Baron might be Jack the Ripper, for aught he knew to the contrary, but my father replied, frowning, that his references were impeccable. I said no more. I was becoming accustomed to the fact that, if ever I liked a school, I was immediately sent away from it to one that I hated. That, I supposed,

was one of the many unpleasant penalties attached to the state of being a child.

On a golden June morning my father put me on the Brussels train in the care of the German Ambassador, who would have been a very nice old gentleman if one could have understood anything, in any language, that he said.

I felt lonely and homesick.

After lunch the German Ambassador spread a handkerchief over his face and soon fell fast asleep. I stared out of the window, at the flat, uninteresting landscape, and wondered what sort of home I would find at the other end of the journey. I had one consolation; a pet lizard, reposing in a cardboard box pierced with holes. When we arrived at the frontier our luggage became temporarily confused, and some obsequious officials, under the impression that my lizard belonged to the German Ambassador, hid its box somewhere among a pile of diplomatic caskets, from which it was only extricated after some persistence on my part. I thought the German Ambassador gave me an odd look, and I understood him to say that he had a horror of reptiles. I felt snubbed, and my spirits sank even lower.

The outskirts of Brussels are as ugly as the outskirts of any other town, and I had never been there before. When the train approached the Gare du Nord, I had a sudden shiver of dread. Here, with unknown people, I was to live until I was supposed to be grown-up and, that was years ahead. I supposed that this time I should have to stay; you cannot always be moved on; there must come a time when, as my lorry driver friend would express it, you stop being "on the run."

I was tired of new faces, new houses, new rules. I thought with a passionate nostalgia of Charlton, of the woods and the streams, of the countryside in which I so much delighted. It was no use thinking of Buster, because she was dead. She

had died while I was at my last French school, and the news of her death had been a bitter blow to me.

She will always represent to me home, comfort, night-lights, fairy tales, the nursery fire glowing behind iron bars, dry socks, porridge, saying one's prayers, cleaning one's teeth, Christmas Eve, birthdays, pantomimes, canaries, powder with jam, and a hundred other memories that are so much part of childhood that childhood would not exist without them. Buster was the English Nanny at her best, and I can find no finer epitaph.

But it would have been no use saying any of this to the German Ambassador.

Conversation had, indeed, languished considerably since the affair of the lizard, but looking at him I was filled with envy. Here was a man who knew exactly where he was going when he arrived in Brussels. He had his own Embassy, his comfortable quarters, his secretaries, and his servants. He would not, in a few minutes' time, face the darkness of uncertainty. I reflected that I would be very willing indeed to change places with him.

At this moment we arrived at the Gare du Nord.

FINDING A FAMILY

IT was not difficult for me to discover the Baron and the Baroness. In fact it was almost impossible to mistake the Baroness. When I saw them I instinctively felt less desolate, for they were not as I had imagined them.

The Baron—Alphonse by name—was a short, round little man with a tiny grey beard and the clear blue eyes of a child. His eyes were childish because he was almost entirely deaf; he lived most of the time in some lovely lost world of his own. He kept bees and bred goldfish; these interests did much to console him for all that he missed in life. I think he went every morning to Mass, but he never talked about his religion, although his was the innocent, trusting faith of a child, but he talked passionately of politics, being a strong supporter of M. Jaspar, and then he would become very angry, and he would shout, and bang his newspaper with his fist, and he would make terrible remarks about the Communists, so that his beard would bristle with furious indignation, and then he would forget entirely that he could not hear the arguments of other people. He was almost always happy, and although his temper was so fiery, he was more of a saint than anyone I have ever known.

His wife, Laurence, was entirely different.

She was the real type of matriarch, the Gypsy *Daya*; artistic, the casual mother of seven children, six of whom were living; magnificent, untidy, and imposing. She was probably more handsome in her middle-age than she had ever been in her youth, but of that I know nothing. I saw a tall, big-boned woman, with a hawk-like nose, blazing

eyes as blue as cornflowers, a shock of gypsy, jetty hair, ear-rings, bangles, brooches, an emerald-green dress, and a scarf of burning orange. She had, incidentally, a voice as deep and hoarse as a fog-horn, which came, I suppose, from having lived for many years with a deaf man.

She painted, and played, not only the piano but the violin. She did all these well, and was superbly indifferent to the "ménage." Her eldest unmarried daughter, Marie-Louise, acted as housekeeper.

These things, of course, I knew later.

At the time, I was aware only of a feeling of relief—there was so little of the school-marm about either of my two guardians. We collected my luggage and got into a taxi. I knew, of course, that the de Haullevilles lived in Tervueren, but I did not know that Tervueren was about twenty minutes' drive from Brussels. Nor did I know that Brussels is one of the few cities in Europe that has so far been fortunate enough to escape the ugliness of suburbs. You drive straight from the town into the Forest of Soignies.

It was June, and the beech-trees were glowing with a tender, radiant green. They spread for many miles, as far as one could see, and the road was arched over by their majestic branches. Sometimes the road broke away from the Forest, and then it was just as beautiful, for it was bordered on each side by thick hedges of vivid blossoming rhododendrons. One vast bush of these plants, called the "massif," is supposed to be the finest of its kind in the world.

The Baron—Alphonse, as I shall continue to call him—was Curator of the Congo Museum at Tervueren. The Museum stands inside the Park, facing a chain of pools and lakes that lead down into the green heart of the Forest. It is a modern building, but must surely be haunted; it stands on the site of that palace where the mad Empress of Mexico lived after her husband's murder. Here, for many years, she wandered disconsolate amid gloomy halls and corridors;

when rare visitors pealed the bell she hid herself behind curtains, and trembled, and doubtless prayed; for in her dim mind there echoed always the shots of the firing-party at Queretaro, that had long ago, on a brilliant, dusty day, robbed her of her husband and her throne, leaving her to walk in darkness for the remainder of her days. One night her Palace was burned to the ground. I do not know who caused the fire, but from its ashes sprang the lovely building that is now Belgium's Congo Museum.

Inside the Park, nestling on green lawns at the flank of the Museum, stood the Pavilion, home of the Curator.

Here was my future home.

During my drive from Brussels I had taken an immediate fancy to my new guardians. One was so courteous, the other so frank; both had the endearing quality of making me feel that I was not a child, but their equal. I suppose my delight in the beauty of the forest pleased them; they were gratified by my whole-hearted admiration of the Park, and of those glittering lakes stretching like a necklace of diamonds into the darkness of the Forest. In fact, we had become very good friends, indeed, although I was a little apprehensive at the thought of meeting six children, all of such different ages. The children, I learned, were called Sisy, Marie-Louise, Sasa, Eric, Hedwige, and Prosper. Sisy was married, and already "*mère de famille*," Marie-Louise and Sasa were grown-up, Eric was studying law, and Hedwige and Prosper attended day-schools in Brussels.

We entered the house, and no sooner had we crossed the threshold than the Baroness, Laurence, cupping her mouth with her hand, proceeded to utter yells the like of which I had never before heard.

"Marie-Louise! Sasa! Sasa! Marie-Louise!"

Completely undisturbed by these ear-splitting sounds, two girls came downstairs and were introduced to me. Marie-Louise, the elder, was plump, blonde, and coquettishly



From a painting by ROBERT McCAMERON

dressed. Sasa had the gypsy looks of her mother, but lacked her mother's beauty.

They shook hands, and we then proceeded to an odd tea party consisting of hot chocolate, brioches, and gingerbread men. The tea party took place in a fantastic boudoir, the walls of which were crammed with Laurence's oil-paintings and where, amid a jungle of ferns and weeds, goldfish swam up and down in long glass tanks. I thought it a delightful room, and ate gingerbread men with the greatest possible contentment.

I found the family relieved to discover that I spoke French. They had been afraid, for not one of them, with the exception of Alphonse, spoke a single word of English. After tea I was shown a bedroom, pink as a fondant, overlooking the Forest, and Marie-Louise and Sasa insisted upon unpacking for me. Several times I had to pinch myself, to be certain that I was awake. It was all too good to be true.

Laurence came wandering in with a cigarette in her mouth, and coloured combs in her hair. She sat down on my bed, supposedly to clean her palette, but in reality to ask innumerable questions about England and English ways.

Were the English as clean as they said they were? Who was supposed to be the best painter in London? Was it easy for English girls to find husbands? Neither Marie-Louise nor Sasa was as yet betrothed, and for her part she took a gloomy view of their future . . . was my mother young-looking? What make of lipstick did she use? Was it true that nearly all English people were divorced and married several times? How much did it cost to hear a good concert in London? Did I desire to take part in many active sports, such as tennis and "footing"? Her daughters were not *sportives*—perhaps that was why—(scowling at them)—their figures were so bad, but Hedwige was fond of "footing," and she was slender.

By this time the carpet was littered with clothes and

Marie-Louise and Sasa were arguing passionately with their mother as to the benefits or not of "le sport."

"*Fichez-moi la paix!*" said she, imperturbably, shrugging her shoulders, and lighting another cigarette.

"*Maman, tu fumes trop!*"

"*Et alors?*"

At this moment there came a tap on the door and a short dark youth came in—Eric, the elder son, who talked so fast that it was almost impossible to understand what he said.

Looking disdainfully at his sisters, he addressed me:

"Will you come for a walk before supper, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes," said I, fortunately before everyone began exclaiming that I was far too tired for any exercise.

Eric and I went out into the park and down past the lakes towards the Forest.

"The only English poet you have," said Eric, "is Edith Sitwell."

"Who is the best Belgian poet?" I enquired respectfully.

"At the moment," Eric replied, "I would say a comrade of mine, a fellow who is studying law with me. He is probably the greatest poet since Rimbaud. But although he is now eighteen, and although he attained, as a poet, full maturity at the age of sixteen, he is as yet unrecognized. I, too, am a poet," he added.

"Are you really?"

"Yes. My father imagines that I am going to become a lawyer, but he's wrong. There are too many lawyers in the world, and too few poets."

Eric talked for some time about André Gide and Jean Cocteau, and other writers with whom I was as yet unfamiliar, and then unconcernedly announced that we were late for supper.

We returned to the house.

THE MATRIARCH

WE sat at supper in a dining-room the veranda of which overlooked the terrace down to the lakes. I met Hedwige, just before the meal; she was a little sallown girl with a charming smile; she studied the violin and was, as I afterwards discovered, a brilliant pupil. We sat down to supper, and I observed that there was still one vacant place, but nobody seemed to notice it.

The children occasionally screamed at their father, although for the most part they talked among themselves, and when they talked too loud Laurence shouted mechanically:

"Ne criez donc pas! Ne criez pas!"

But she herself shouted louder than anyone.

Half-way through the meal the door opened and a boy came into the room. He was about my own age, and he seemed all arms and legs. His shorts were too short, as were his socks; his hair was too long, and flopped over his eyes. He was about to edge into his chair when he saw me, and came across to shake hands with me. He had a wide, disarming smile. He must immediately have regretted thus calling attention to himself, for everyone at once began to scold him.

"Why are you late, Prosper?"

"He hasn't washed his hands!"

"He looks like a scarecrow!"

"He's disgusting!"

As for Prosper's father, he put on his spectacles, glared at him across the table, and pronounced with an awful emphasis the words:

"*Mauvais garnement!*"

The unfortunate seemed well accustomed to such greetings; he took no notice, but began to eat his supper ravenously. I was sorry for him, for the food must have been cold, and his father, in order to punish his unpunctuality, sternly refused him so much as a sip of wine. I glanced at him across the table, and our eyes met; once again he smiled, and so did I.

After supper Marie-Louise and Sasa began to ask me about London parties, but I knew nothing about these things, as I had always been either at school or at Charlton. Eric had vanished, no doubt to wrestle with his muse, Hedwige was apparently doing her home-work, Alphonse had gone off to attend to his goldfish, and Laurence announced that she was about to wash her hair. I was feeling rather lonely when Prosper appeared to ask if it was true that I owned a lizard.

"Yes," I said, jumping up, "would you like to see it!"

"Oh, don't let Prosper bother you!" one of his sisters protested.

"But I'd love to show him the lizard," I said, with perfect truth.

We went off together, and Prosper was passionately interested in the lizard.

"I'd like to have some animals here more than anything," he said, "but they won't let me."

"Why?"

"Papa and Maman don't like animals, that's why. But I've got some ants. Their nest is under one of the stones on the veranda, and I feed them every day. And I look at them through a magnifying glass I got from Papa's study. But don't tell anyone."

"I won't," I said; "can't we look at them now?"

"Better not, to-night. They'd see us, on the veranda, and then they'd guess about the ants, and throw them

away, and I couldn't bear that. You see, they're the only pets I've ever had in all my life."

"Prosper," I said, impulsively, "you can have half my lizard, if you like."

"Do you really mean that?"

"I swear I do."

I suppose it was from that moment that we first became friends.

"Listen," Prosper suggested, "would you like to see the underground passage that leads from this house to the Museum?"

"Do you mean now? Can we really?"

"Yes, but we must be quiet, because Papa forbids any of us to use it. But if you wait here, I'll go and get the keys."

The underground passage was long and dark and winding. There were huge vaults on either side, and it was here, on Sunday afternoons, that the girls played forbidden and flirtatious games of hide-and-seek with the young men who called to see them.

We climbed the stairs leading to the Museum, which was closed now, and in darkness. Here, for some time I wandered about enthralled. The Museum is a mysterious place, especially when it is empty, and shafts of moonlight illuminate the distorted masks of witch-doctors and magicians, whose effigies loom from the duskiest corners.

"Look!" Prosper said, pointing to a huge stuffed elephant.

"What?"

"If you crawl underneath him, you'll see that he has a trap-door in his stomach. In the War, when the Germans were here, Papa hid all his silver in the elephant's inside, and it was never discovered. Of course, if they'd found it, Papa would have been shot."

"Were the Germans bad? I mean, the ones who were here?"

"They weren't bad to us. There were two of them living

in the house. They carved their names on Maman's best wardrobe, but they were all right really. Listen, we'd better go back now, or they may guess where we've been."

As we picked our way along the underground passage Prosper said:

"It's my half-holiday to-morrow. Would you like it if we took our tea out into the Forest?"

"Can we really?"

"Of course. I'm the only one of the family who really likes the Forest. Hedwige quite does, but Eric doesn't, and Marie-Louise and Sasa would lose themselves before they'd gone a kilometre."

"Do you know it well?"

"I think I know it all."

"How big is it?"

"It's about thirty square miles."

"Then how can you possibly know it all?"

"I'll show you. You can get to different places by tram, or you can bicycle. Besides, I've lived here all my life."

The next morning two disasters occurred. My pet lizard escaped, and finding its way to the roof devoured most of my host's bees, afterwards disappearing for ever. This was bad enough, but worse was to come. A few hours later Marie-Louise discovered the ants on the veranda, and despite Prosper's passionate entreaties, proceeded to kill the entire tribe. He turned very white, and I thought that he was going to be sick. In my turn, although I had my own troubles, I tried to argue with her, but she said, with some surprise, that I was as bad as Prosper.

After lunch we went off into the Forest, still gloomy, although, perhaps to make amends for the ants, Marie-Louise had packed us a splendid tea of brioches, ginger-bread, and lemonade.

I have written so much about the Forest of Soignies in a book called *The Spanish House* that I will do no more here

than repeat that its beauty, at all times of the year, is such as I have discovered nowhere else. Thanks to Prosper, I was eventually to know its every glade, and path, and pool, and thicket; it was a world of enchantment; it was Shakespeare's Wood near Athens, and the home of Debussy's Faun; on moonlight nights it was easy to believe that sylphides danced by the lakes beneath the beech-trees. But it was more than that; it was our second home, our secret kingdom; once in the Forest we were free as air.

The de Haullevilles thought it odd of me to run wild with Prosper, who was in those days very much the black sheep of the family, but as Laurence said: "*Que voulez-vous? Elle est Anglaise, et tous les Anglais sont fous. . .*"

It seemed just as odd to me that we were the only ones to love the woods. The others were the mad ones; they ignored this beauty lying at their very threshold, and thought of the Forest only as a place where they got lost, or got their feet wet.

We, on the other hand, saw many things unknown to them. We saw gypsies, poachers, and pedlars. We made friends with them, and watched their work. When little fairs, or "kermesses," came to the villages nearby we lingered near the caravans, ran errands, and usually succeeded in ingratiating ourselves with the showmen. It was in Belgium that I first became friendly with the people of the fair-ground, who are quite different from the people of the circus, and quite different, again, from the remote gypsies, who walk apart from all of them, always taking for their own the darkest, wildest paths in the Forest.

I met all types at Tervueren, and it was there that I first began to know them well.

There were often caravans on the long roads leading through the Forest. The little fairs were held almost every Sunday in the villages nearby, and wagons were often loaded with piles of spotted, scarlet-nostrilled horses belonging to

the merry-go-round proprietors. The gypsies hawked baskets, clothes-pegs, and brooms made of heather. Then there were knife-grinders, and accordion-players, and "crocuses"—vendors of patent medicines. There were also tramps, who were not interested in selling anything; who plodded slowly onwards, only slipping into the woods at dusk to return with rabbits, still warm, stowed away in the capacious pockets of their poachers' jackets. Sometimes there were sailormen from Antwerp, and I recollect an engaging family of monkey-like Arabian tumblers.

All these people were bound by one tie—the fellowship of the road. For various reasons they had discarded civilization like a snake-skin and now the road claimed them, so that they could not rest until they knew what was happening round the next corner. Rain chilled them, and the wind pierced their rags; they were choked with dust, they were often blistered by the sun, from which the majority had only the rudest shelters, and they were almost always footsore, but they were united in their contempt for those who live in houses. They were the wolves, as opposed to the house-dogs. They had nothing, and yet the world was theirs, and they called no man master. Like wolves, too, they were fierce and rapacious, but they observed their own strange laws, nor were they lacking in courage.

They passed through the Forest in a ragged and gaudy procession, and I was never tired of watching them on their way.

INTERVAL FOR ROMANCE

"I DO not understand," Laurence said, vehemently, "why none of my four daughters should be beautiful. . . . Oh, yes—you may laugh, now, because I'm an old woman in an old dress covered with paint, but I can assure you that when I was young I was beautiful."

She threw back her head as she said this, looking so magnificent that I wished that I, not she, were the painter.

"For boys," she continued, "it doesn't matter so much, although for my part I have always admired handsome young men. But for a girl with no *dot* and no looks, life can be hard."

At this moment Marie-Louise came into the studio.

"Maman, I thought you took Prosper into Brussels yesterday to buy him a new suit?"

"So I did. Why?"

"Because, although the tailor hasn't sent any suit for Prosper, he's sent several rolls of tweed in a parcel addressed to *you*."

"That's quite true! By the time I'd chosen some tweeds for myself there wasn't any time for the suit. But I'll take him in again next week."

"But, Maman, this is the third time it's happened. Last time you forgot you had Prosper with you, and you left him in the shop without a penny for his tram-fare home, and he had to borrow it from one of the shopwalkers."

"*Ne m'embête pas!* I've told you I'll take him in again!"

All the same, I cannot remember when Prosper got his new suit, and he certainly needed one, for he was growing

out of his clothes, and looked, in consequence, rather like the puppet, Petroushka. I believe that he was teased at school about the extreme shortness of his shorts, but with the sweetness that was so much a part of his character, it never occurred to him to complain. But he was not pleased with me, for I was engaged in my first flirtation, and Prosper declared that the young man in question, Maurice, "spoilt everything." Maurice was an auburn-haired youth of eighteen, a cadet at the Military School, and I thought his khaki uniform the smartest I had ever seen.

Every Saturday night Laurence asked five or six young men to supper. After supper we danced, or wandered out into the rose-scented park, to sit on the edge of the big lily-pond. If the nights were warm enough, we picnicked on the lawn among the roses, and from these revels Prosper, in response to urgent entreaties from his sisters, was always banished.

"I suppose he's better away," his mother agreed, "he's certainly at the awkward age."

I do not think I was very kind to my friend in those days. When the three of us went out together in the Forest, Maurice wishing to be rid of him, teased him unmercifully, while I remained inactive. Prosper was sensitive, and suffered agonies. Sometimes Maurice would chase him away, and at last he would take to his heels, but he always returned, to follow us from a distance. He was like an Indian in the Forest; he moved so softly and so swiftly that no one could guess behind which tree-trunk he was hiding. Maurice tried bribery, but he chose the wrong person. Although Prosper never had so much as fifty centimes in his pockets, he flung Maurice's ten francs upon the ground with a gesture of superb contempt.

Maurice had *cong * on Wednesdays, and he asked me one day if I would meet him in Brussels. Upon my assurance to Laurence that my parents would not object, I accepted this

invitation. We went to the cinema and ate ice-cream afterwards at the Cinquantenaire before I caught the tram home.

We enjoyed the afternoon so much that we decided to meet again on the following Wednesday. Then these expeditions became a weekly arrangement, and it was soon observed in the household that Prosper was impossibly naughty on Wednesdays. Usually, when I returned home, he had been sent to bed for some outrageous act or other.

But I had other preoccupations.

How happy I was, that summer at Tervueren!

Maurice and I thought that we were in love with one another and we decided to become engaged. We both thought it prudent to conceal this betrothal, and for the first time, I became aware of the fact that Maurice's existence was menaced by his father's sternness. He did not, however, see fit to tell me that he was supposed to spend his Wednesday holidays working for an examination, and so we continued to visit the cinema. Sometimes, on fine afternoons, we went instead to the Bois, where we rowed on the lake, or wandered beneath the chestnut-blossom, or sat holding hands on the green slopes that rolled down to the edge of the water.

We always "tu-toyéd" each other, and this was thought by older people a little shocking, but everything was always quite seriously explained by the fact that I was English, and therefore mad. In any case, Maurice was a singularly charming boy, and there was a freshness and an innocence about our relationship together that neither one of us has quite forgotten. Sometimes, nowadays, I get a letter from him beginning: "*Bonjour, ma chère jeunesse . . .*" and then I remember with a faint pang of nostalgia the chestnut-trees in the Avenue Louise, the rose-garden at Tervueren, our lily-pond, and Maurice's voice talking—so earnestly—about the future. Of course we were not always serious; he was

eighteen, and I was not sixteen; the sight of an ice-cream was enough to turn us into children again.

Usually we visited a little café by the Cinquante-naire. It had the double advantages of being near the tram-stop, and near Maurice's home. Little did we know of the disagreeable old lady, a friend of Maurice's parents, who lived opposite to the café and who apparently had so little to do that she spent her time watching us through a pair of opera-glasses.

One day we met there as usual and Maurice produced for me *Quo Vadis*, a book I had never read.

"Only don't lose it," he said, "because I got it from my father's library, and he's very fussy about his books."

At this precise moment a shadow fell across our table, and to my astonishment I perceived that Maurice's collar was in sudden process of being tightly grasped by a tall, soldierly man who must have tiptoed most deceitfully behind us.

Maurice grew scarlet.

"Papa!" he gasped.

"*Misérable!*"

"Let me go!" protested the unfortunate Maurice, slowly strangling.

"*Scélérat!*"

"Let him go!" said I.

I was still holding *Quo Vadis*, and I was mystified by the entire scene; as I spoke, Maurice's terrible parent released his son only to attempt unsuccessfully to snatch the book from me.

"As for you, Mademoiselle, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"How did I know this book was yours?"

"I am not referring to the book, which, however, I will be glad to retrieve, as it possesses a certain value. I am referring to your own behaviour."

"Papa!"

"Be silent, thou! You, Mademoiselle, are a young lady I have been anxious to meet. Do you realize the irreparable harm you are doing my son?"

"Papa——"

"Do you realize that when he should have been studying—for his most important examination—he has neglected everything to run about Brussels with you? Cinemas, cafés, visits to Tervueren! He's a frivolous, wasteful young idler, and you, by encouraging him in his bad habits will most certainly be held responsible if he fails—as he undoubtedly will—in this turning-point of his miserable, insignificant career!"

Maurice had always told me that his father was the terror of his regiment, and now I began to know what he meant.

"How dare you say it's my fault?" I protested. "I never even knew he was supposed to be working on Wednesdays."

But it was difficult to stop Maurice's father. I do not suppose that many people ever tried.

"What are your parents about, Mademoiselle? Or your guardians? Are you allowed to run wild, as appears to be the case?"

During the course of this conversation I was grasping, without knowing that I did so, the famous book, *Quo Vadis*.

Frog-marching Maurice out of the café, the terrible old man tried again to snatch the book from my hands. But by this time I had lost my temper. Without realizing that his parade-ground voice had caused a crowd to collect, I suddenly hurled the book at his head. It hit him, making a bruise on his cheek.

The crowd burst out laughing, but I was suddenly a little afraid. Maurice's father's face was magenta. Maurice's was ashen white. I caught a glimpse of him being marched away, like a naughty child, before I fled from the scene.

On returning home, I decided to say nothing about this somewhat humiliating adventure, but I had reckoned

without the disagreeable old lady, who had observed the incident through her invaluable opera-glasses. The next day all my friends heard the story, and I was unmercifully teased.

I said nothing, but I thought profoundly. During the course of these reflections I came to the conclusion that Maurice had behaved somewhat sheepishly, in thus allowing his beloved to be publicly insulted. Prosper, I knew, in a similar situation, would rather have died than give in, and Prosper was only a lanky schoolboy, whereas Maurice, at eighteen, was fond of declaring himself a man of the world.

The result of this affair was a certain coolness between Maurice and myself. For his part, in view of his examinations, he must have been delighted, although he pretended to be heart-broken. But I think that afterwards neither one of us seemed quite so perfect to the other. The freshness of that first enchantment was gone, never again to be recaptured, and although we met and laughed and talked together on Sunday afternoons, what we had so grandly referred to as our engagement was tacitly considered to be at an end.

Once more I turned to Prosper for companionship ; once more we ran wild together in the woods.

THE FOREST OF SOIGNES

I READ voraciously at Tervueren. Eric lent me books which, if I had been more truthful, I would have admitted that I did not understand. But I made discoveries of my own. I much annoyed my very well-read mother by writing:

“You really ought to read the books of a man called Guy de Maupassant. His short stories are brilliant. . . .”

When I was sixteen I went to my first ball, a spectacular affair at the British Embassy. I enjoyed it for a little while, and I was fascinated by my first grown-up evening-dress, which had been sent to me from London, but I soon became tired of talking to so many strangers, with the result that unwittingly I committed, in the eyes of Belgian mothers, a frightful sin.

The Ambassador possessed eight huge Irish wolfhounds, with which, on less formal occasions, I was fond of playing.

After supper one of the young *attachés* suggested that we should go and look at the wolfhounds, which lived in a large kennel in the garden, and so we wandered off across the lawn.

The dogs were so delighted to see us that they began bounding against the door, which at once burst open, with the result that the eight immediately galloped, baying with pleasure, into the ballroom, where they created as much unfavourable attention as though they had been a herd of elephants.

But this, bad though it was, was not the worst. According to the mothers of Brussels, I had committed the unforgiv-

able sin; I, a young girl, had deliberately secreted myself with a man where it was not possible for the chaperones to see *from two different angles* exactly what I was doing! For this is, or was, the rule for débutantes in Belgium. One angle is not enough. You must, if you do not wish to be "fast," concentrate on both . . . as I have explained, I had not even given the most fleeting attention to one, with the result that the scandal of the wolfhounds in the ballroom was as nothing compared to the other, unguessed solecism.

Even Laurence was unsympathetic when she heard the tale.

People, she said, were gossiping. It appeared that the incident of the Embassy Ball, combined with the episode of Maurice's father, had made the old ladies of Brussels discuss me spitefully.

"*Tu sais comme ils sont dégoûtants, les gens. . .*"

I was very angry. I said that I wouldn't go to any more dances. Nor did I. Nowadays, I would have been indifferent to these *mauvaises langues*. The majority of people prefer to slander rather than to praise, and sooner or later one accepts this fact with philosophy. Personally, I am always pleasantly surprised whenever I hear anyone saying anything agreeable about anyone else, but I was simpler, at Tervueren, and in any case, I have never been fond of society. I threw myself heart and soul into the de Haullevilles' life. One of my chief worries at this time was Prosper's lack of pocket-money, for this poverty, combined with his own fierce pride, made him refuse many a delicacy when we were out together.

Finally we solved the question.

We stole flowers from the Forest and sold them to Sunday tourists at the tram-station. Water-lilies, bluebells, daffodils, primroses—anything that happened to be in season. When English or American visitors came to the Museum I offered to guide them, and insisted upon Prosper accepting the tips I received. I invariably represented myself to these tourists as a Belgian.

"But where," they would ask, "did you learn such wonderful English?"

"I was a refugee in England, when I was a baby, in the War," I would reply demurely.

I usually identified myself with whatever towns the visitors themselves came from, and it is astonishing to recollect the enthusiasm this ruse inspired. I do not suppose that many of these people were away from England for more than a week, but to hear a Belgian declare that she was vaguely familiar with Huddersfield, Coventry, or Cardiff, always aroused in them sentiments of homesickness combined, happily for us, with those of generosity. Soon Prosper had most of the things that other boys have. I don't think that we were consciously dishonest, for his needs were really greater than those of the tourists.

Alphonse was very poor.

He had nothing but the salary he received as Curator of the Museum, and his family was enormous. In addition to the children, there was Madame Cambier, Laurence's witty, delightful mother, and there was his own sister, Tante Zoë, an unsmiling old maid who seemed always just to have emerged from the *béguinage* of some sad, half-forgotten Flemish town. Of the children, although Sisy was married, Marie-Louise and Sasa were not; Eric was a student at the University, and Hedwige and Prosper were of course still at school. Alphonse never complained, but I think matters were often difficult.

Alphonse is dead now, God rest his soul, and another curator lives in the lovely Pavilion at Tervueren. Laurence still paints all day long, and all the children, with the exception of Prosper, are married and have children of their own, children who will never know the joys of running wild in the Forest, as we did. Prosper is now a brilliant young engineer, and we meet every year in Brussels. Then we motor down to Tervueren in his car, and retrace together

the paths where once we wandered as children. It all seems long ago, and the Park is thick with ghosts that have for many years been scattered.

It is odd to stroll back from the lakes towards the Pavilion knowing that the de Haullevilles, with all their vitality and colour and charm are gone, and that strangers live there now.

If I shut my eyes, I can recapture it, just for a moment, as it was. It is summer, and the Park is flushed with roses. Alphonse sits on the porch, a silk handkerchief spread over his head, reading Jaspar's latest speech. Sometimes he mutters, and talks to himself, as deaf people will, and sometimes he drops his paper to slap ineffectually at a fly. From inside the house the strains of a violin proclaim that Hedwige is practising in the unused drawing-room. She will practise there for hours, standing pale and small in the midst of gilt and ormolu and monstrous Victorian chairs and tables and divans. And in a bedroom window overlooking the Park two girls are laughing, for Sasa is trying to make Marie-Louise's hair look like Constance Bennett's. Eric is shut in the study, wrestling with a sonnet, and he shouts at them to be quiet, but they pay no attention, for at that moment Constance Bennett is more important to them than any sonnet. On the roof Alphonse's bees are buzzing with a lazy, droning sound, and at any moment Maurice's curly copper head will peep round the French windows, and he will carry a bunch of roses, and he will make mischievous faces behind Alphonse's back. Then he will hide, for Laurence is coming, and Maurice is always a little afraid of Laurence. She stalks onto the porch, majestic in her paint-daubed overall, to ask Alphonse what he would like for supper. He waves her angrily away, for she is disturbing his political reflections, but she is one who will not take No for an answer, and so she persists, until he capitulates. How splendid she is, with her mane of jetty hair, her defiant foghorn of a

voice, her blazing blue eyes, her jingling ear-rings, all her glitter and vitality! She is a figure straight from the Second Empire and although it would make her very angry indeed, I must confess that I will always associate her with the music of Offenbach. As usual, she dominates the stage, and the figure of a little boy slipping homewards through the beech-trees becomes clouded, as though the dream were already fading. But the scent of roses is everywhere, and I know, without opening my eyes, that in the Forest the summer foliage is so dense that one walks through the glades in a green twilight, as though beneath the sea, and this is the time of year when the nightingale sings all night.

The last time that I ventured thus into the past was in the winter. When I opened my eyes again Tervueren glistened in the frost, and the lakes were thick with ice. Everything was cold and desolate. For a moment I thought I had dreamed that summer of the past; its loveliness seemed ephemeral; the gap between past and present too vast to be spanned by anything more tangible than a wistful imagination.

Later that day I motored out to Gheel, the Town of the Mad. Here, close to the shrine of St. Dymphna, patron saint of the insane, thousands of lunatics live at peace, and in freedom. Not one is shut up, and not one ever tries to escape. I sat at a café watching the fog rise up in a thick wall. When we went out to the car, the mist swathed us in grey coils, and everywhere, from out of the dimness, peered the pale, empty faces of mad people.

They were ghostly enough, but not more ghostly than those other faces that I had, at Tervueren, so recently conjured from the past.

PART II

THE TENTS OF SHEM

WHEN I returned to England, after living for some years in Belgium, I felt something of a stranger in my own country, and I have never quite got over the feeling. I had unconsciously absorbed many of the standards of another nation; I had become accustomed to the French language; I had grown interested in French literature, and even in Belgian politics; the theatre for me had come to mean Pitöeff and Guitry rather than Noel Coward. The difference in outlook was sharp enough to be thoroughly confusing.

Freddie was now a prominent figure at Eton, with interests all his own, and most of my girl friends were throwing themselves enthusiastically into the business of becoming débutantes.

I must have been born a rebel. In any case, I had no sooner returned to England than I began to fight with violence against what Brussels called "le monde." I flatly refused to become a débutante. When my parents argued with me I insisted that I had "come out" when I was sixteen at the unfortunate British Embassy Ball, and I was prepared to go no further in the matter.

"Your father's ready to give a dance for you," said my mother.

"I don't want one."

"People will think you're a hunchback, or half-witted," said my mother.

"What does it matter if I'm not?" I argued.

"I think you're mad," said my mother.

When they insisted upon dragging me to two or three

parties, I slipped away whenever I had the opportunity, and they soon realized that it was a hopeless business. I was consequently left in peace, and I was grateful, for I have never been able to endure meeting large quantities of strangers at the same time, and a big private dance has always been my idea of hell.

I rode every morning in the Park with my father, and devoted the rest of the day to finishing a novel called *The Tents of Shem*. This was a book of 80,000 words—an ambitious effort for a seventeen-year-old. It was, if I remember rightly, very, very cynical. I wrote it in a room made uninhabitable by burning joss-sticks; wore long ear-rings, and fancied myself in a pale, tragic make-up.

When *The Tents of Shem* was finished I decided that it would look very grand indeed to see myself in type, and accordingly, under the name of "Miss Smith," I left the precious manuscript with a well-known agency. I told no one of this decision, nor did I mention to a soul that I had written yet another novel.

About a fortnight later I received a letter from the principal of the typing agency, asking me to go and see her. She added that the matter was important.

I was still young enough to be convinced that I had unwittingly done wrong, and I decided that I must, in all innocence, have committed some frightful plagiarism for which I was about to be imprisoned.

I set off, therefore, in some trepidation.

I was much relieved at being, on arrival, received affably.

"Do sit down, Miss Smith," said the principal, and came straight to the point. "Do you know of Mr. John Lane, the publisher?"

Such was my appalling ignorance that I did not. I had, however, heard of the Bodley Head, when Mr. Lane was explained further to me, and soon I was pinching myself to make sure that I was not dreaming.



WITH PAM AND FREDDIE ON THE YACHT "MAJRI"

"Mr. Lane," I was told, "is interested in discovering young authors. He often comes in here to ask us if we have any manuscripts worth reading, and we took the liberty of showing him yours . . . he thinks it has promise, and he would very much like you to come and see him. . . ."

I walked out of this office in such a daze that I was nearly run over five times. Policemen shouted at me, taxi-drivers swore, and errand-boys were abusive. But I was oblivious. Always secretive where my own work was concerned, I confided in no one, but I wrote to Mr. Lane.

I received a charming letter from him asking me to come to his house at four o'clock that next Tuesday. I do not know how I existed during the ensuing three days, but I must have been about as restful as a fire-cracker. I was constantly torn between the emotions of excitement, terror, and delight. I would not believe that any success could come so easily. Perhaps it was a practical joke. Perhaps I had dreamed the whole affair. By Tuesday morning I was feverish.

When I arrived at Mr. Lane's house near Hyde Park my legs were trembling. In view of the fact that I had dressed myself with what I considered to be extreme sophistication it was a little disconcerting to be greeted by:

"Dear me, dear me—I didn't know you were quite so young as that, my dear Miss Smith!"

He was not at all my idea of a publisher. He was old, and frail, and silver-haired. I was immensely awed.

John Lane was delightful to me.

He really seemed to have discerned some merit in this immature novel of mine, and he told me that, if I would be willing to consider certain minor alterations, he was prepared to publish the book.

I said I was willing to consider the alterations.

"Very well," he said, "come and see me next Tuesday, at this time. I'll have the manuscript then, and I'll show you what I mean."

I left in a whirl of excitement, not even remembering, until he reminded me, to give him my address and telephone number.

It so happened that he wanted to see me earlier than the arranged time, and when his secretary telephoned asking for "Miss Smith," a pompous footman retorted:

"You mean Lady Eleanor, I presume?"

Therefore when I arrived the following week he astonished me by saying:

"Why didn't you tell me you were Lord Birkenhead's daughter?"

I must have turned scarlet.

I stammered at length:

"I would have thought you only wanted to publish my book because I've got a famous father!"

"That's not the way I do business," said John Lane, smiling at my dismay.

He showed me, with infinite patience, the alterations he required. Unlike many publishers, he believed in encouraging young writers, and I think he was right. It is not often that you are arrogant when you are young and struggling. Arrogance comes later—with huge royalties, film contracts, and lecture tours. I know many successful writers who are arrogant, but the few great writers I have known have been singularly modest. Or shall we say that they give with extraordinary success the impression of modesty?

I left John Lane in a warm glow of confidence. I was as one intoxicated. It seemed strange to me that he wished me to cut the more cynical and bitter portions of my book, but I was ready to obey blindly. I sat down to work with a feeling of radiant happiness.

A few days later I bought an evening paper only to see that John Lane had died suddenly.

I was distraught.

I think then that I was right; success cannot come to

one out of the blue. It would not have been advantageous had I achieved success with a novel written at the age of seventeen, and, to be frank, I do not think that I would ever have achieved success with that particular novel.

I put it away for a few months, and when I took it out again I disliked it so much that I destroyed it in a moment of absolute hatred.

I have never regretted that particular bonfire.

The other day, John Lane's nephew, Allen, asked me to write a circus book for him. One day I want to do that book, for I will always remember what John Lane's encouragement meant to me when I was young enough and crude enough to think *The Tents of Shem* a masterpiece.

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CHAMBER OF HORRORS

I WAS restless and discontented; too disappointed even to think of starting another book. But I was bubbling over with energy and vitality, and as Buster had so often said to me in the past, "Satan finds work for idle hands."

I entered upon a period of my life that I loathe to recall.

I played practical jokes, joined treasure hunts that lasted until dawn, and worried a great many old gentlemen by riding a stallion in the Row.

Very often I sighed for the peace and charm of Tervueren, and longed for Prosper's companionship, but I never made any attempt to return to either. I was possessed by a very frenzy of restlessness.

I should like to explain that these treasure-hunts, which afterwards became impossible, were a harmless enough amusement when started by Zita, Baby, Enid Raphael, and myself. One Sunday afternoon we could think of nothing to do, and it was finally arranged that Zita and myself, with five minutes' start, should try to escape from the others, leaving clues behind us wherever we went. We could not afford taxis, but buses and tubes were permissible, and we, the hares, were to visit as many places of public interest as could be managed during our flight.

From this innocuous beginning developed the treasure hunts and scavenger hunts that are still in vogue to-day. I only wish we had held some form of patent.

Another favourite joke was to dress Baby as a Russian spy named Anna Worolski and to encourage her to fascinate young men who invariably "fell" for her story of hidden

Russian jewels. This game was a more innocent variant of almost every confidence trick, and I can only agree with Barnum when he said—referring to fools—“there’s one born every minute.”

Baby, aged sixteen, looked, as Anna Worolski, a mixture of Pola Negri and Anna Sten. She wore her mother’s mink, a black wig, and Woolworth pearls. Her success was stupendous.

Another amusement was for the three of us to dress as female reporters and thus attired—in our mother’s clothes—to visit film stars as representatives of non-existent newspapers. Oddly enough, we were never caught, and we spent some pleasant afternoons thus employed. I suppose it kept us out of worse mischief, but I am sorry for the film stars, who so patiently and so uselessly gave us their time.

I am not often ashamed, but I am so ashamed of these coltish high spirits that it makes me feel uncomfortable to write about them. Quite apart from any other considerations, I am sorry that so much energy, so much industry, should have been so stupidly wasted. Once again I blame the foolish educational system under which I suffered. Quite recently, I became interested in the Red Cross; this was something I had never learned at school, and it seems to me really shocking to think that we never, at any time, studied anything so useful.

Once a young man betted me that I would not sleep the night in Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors. I said that I would do it if I might have a companion. He agreed, and on one foggy night Zita and I set forth upon this adventure.

Tussaud’s closes at ten o’clock. We went in at nine-fifteen, and entered the Chamber of Horrors five minutes later. The place was almost empty, but we took no chances. We walked around for some time and finally—taking advantage of the last visitor’s departure—we climbed into the original

Old Bailey Dock, in which stood the prisoner, Seddon, hearing sentence of death, surrounded by two solid, waxen warders.

For my part, haunted as I was by childish nightmares of men hanging, this was almost the worst part of the adventure. It took considerable agility to climb into this dock, and when we ourselves were hidden, the images continued to sway, so that we cowered down, clinging on to their legs, praying that no one might see them totter.

An official prowled down the Chamber, calling:

"Everyone out, please! Closing-time! Everyone out!"

He then extinguished the lights.

We were left alone with Mr. Seddon and his warders.

Seddon was one of the meanest criminals in existence. He poisoned an elderly lodger by means of arsenic obtained from fly-papers. When he had murdered her, he gave her a pauper's funeral. He had none of Crippen's chivalry. He was a vile murderer.

I have seen Scotland Yard's Black Museum, and I really think, that of the two, the Chamber of Horrors is more sordid and more frightening. This may be an entirely personal prejudice, but I do not think that I shall easily forget for how long, after the lights were turned out, Mr. Seddon's cold, stiff knees continued to sway.

When he at last became quiescent, we collapsed unhappily upon the floor of the dock.

It is not agreeable, in the Chamber of Horrors, when the lights are extinguished. We had electric-torches, and when we lit them, an orange circle of illumination fell upon the pale, fixed masks of a hundred men who had killed, and who had suffered death for killing. A chill draught blew through the hall, rustling the ropes with which these men had been hanged. Their faces were stiff and impersonal, but their beady eyes glittered. It was impossible not to imagine that these men moved, once the lights were extin-

guished; impossible not to suppose that they fidgeted, shifting hands in pockets; impossible not to believe that they winked, and chewed gum, and talked out of the corner of their mouths, that they in fact betrayed—in wax—those nasty mannerisms that they must have exhibited so often in their lives. It was, in fact, impossible to watch them without supposing that they possessed some vile, secret existence of their own; they seemed to stir, once the lights were put down; it was as though they then exhibited a sinister interest, a diabolical inquisitiveness in matters that should no longer have concerned them, once they had encountered the hangman's noose.

We endured this until one o'clock—for three hours. If anyone is inclined to jeer at our cowardice, I suggest that they try the same experiment.

By one o'clock we were cramped, cold, smothered with dust, and desperately uncomfortable.

I said to Zita:

"Do you remember the tableau upstairs, where the little Princes are being smothered on the bed?"

"Yes," she answered, sneezing so violently that all the images seemed to tremble.

"Let us," I whispered, "go upstairs to that tableau, and put the little Princes very gently on the floor . . . we can't hurt them, and we can at least get some rest ourselves. . . ."

Zita, sneezing again, answered that this would be dishonourable, and we began to argue so passionately that Mr. Seddon's knees once again quivered.

Finally, we reached a compromise. We would leave the Horrors for the Princes' bed, but we would be honest, the next day, about our movements. We would not pretend that we had spent the entire night in the Horrors.

We shuffled upstairs, and avoiding images became quite a sport. I wish those people who jeer at superstition could try this sport—it does not lack excitement.

Upstairs, we were about to lift the young Princes from their death-bed when a frightful thing happened.

From across the desolate hall we heard the echo of impatient footsteps. In a moment, as we listened, we saw the yellow blur of a lantern. We were so stupefied by fear that we stood there gaping, while our hearts thumped.

It is now a consolation to know that the night-watchman was just as frightened, but at the time it did not help us.

He approached us shaking, his bright lantern bobbing in his hand.

I called to him, and my voice echoed strangely in that chamber of waxen kings.

"We're locked in! Please will you let us out?"

He knew then that we were human.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "you naughty girls! Won't you just catch it!"

Nobody can be more angry than someone who has just been badly frightened. In the end, however, he let us out by a side-door. It was early morning when we arrived home, and we were so thickly powdered with dust that we might have been out in a snowstorm.

I have heard, since then, that Mr. Tussaud was much annoyed by this adventure of ours. If that is really the case, I can only apologize. It was not an agreeable evening, and I would be extremely sorry to repeat it. But if he would like to know how ghastly his own Chamber of Horrors appears by dark, I would be only too glad to testify. As I have said before, Scotland Yard's Black Museum is, in comparison, a Mickey Mouse film, and I do not very ardently desire to spend a night in the Black Museum.

Fortunately I was afterwards able to write a story about the Chamber of Horrors, and I was lucky enough to be able to turn this story to good account.

WEEKLY GOSSIP

MY father loved travelling abroad, and he loved to take his family with him.

Irreverent secretaries christened these tours "F. E.'s Circus."

One year we went to the South of Spain, where I met my first matador. I asked him to tea, and was able to converse with him in shy, pidgin Spanish. The high-spot of the afternoon was when he suddenly, with a dazzling smile, let down a frizzy, unsuspected pigtail. His name was Antonio Marquez, and he was a good fighter. I heard, then for the first time, flamenco music, but we did not stay long, in Spain. We went on to Madeira.

My father loved Madeira, and we went there every Christmas for some years.

These days came after Blenheim, so that Christmas, in my mind, is really associated with swimming in sapphire seas, with dancing out of doors among the palm-trees, and with a Christmas-tree party held out of doors, in glittering sunshine.

My father, in Madeira, was superb. He played vigorous tennis, and when he was not playing tennis, he was diving from the high board. He met some crooks in the Casino, and they challenged him to a spelling-bee; imperturbable, he challenged them to a diving competition. The crooks never turned up.

Gambling in Madeira was a charming sport. On Sunday afternoons many mothers came to the Casino, and were wont to park their babies on the tables while they leaned

over to make roulette bets. My father broke the modest bank several times, and then he was like a school-boy. Madeira, in those days, was a paradise of sunshine, cornflower seas, camellias, violets, dancing by moonlight, and soft, Portuguese *fados*.

Americo da Silva was at that time the plump, genial god of this Utopia.

"What?" he would exclaim, whenever contradicted, "so you would cross me? What the damn do you mean? Was I not at one time Governor of this bloody Island?"

We went to Madeira every Christmas, but we sometimes went to Switzerland, and often to Italy.

All the same it was in Madeira that I finally found a job.

A friend of my father's said to me:

"Would you like to write for the newspapers?"

"Oh, yes!"

I never expected to hear any more from him, but when we returned to London I found that he was serious. I was engaged by an evening paper to write "Women's Gossip" twice a week. The page to which I contributed was anonymous, and I received three pounds a week.

I have seldom been more satisfied.

I worked for six months at this job, and while I do not suppose that I gave very much satisfaction, I was certainly enthusiastic.

I had always wished to be a novelist, and I knew nothing whatever about journalism, but although I did not know it, journalism was to give me a helping hand.

One day Mr. Charles Graves came to see me.

He said:

"There's a job going on a certain Sunday paper, and I believe you can do it. Will you have a shot?"

Naturally, I said yes, but I think I was frank about my lack of qualifications.

"Nonsense!" said he, "you'll soon pick it up!"



WITH FREDDIE AT MADEIRA

I will always be grateful to Charles Graves, because he, after John Lane's death, was the only person I have ever known who encouraged me to write professionally.

Much to my amazement, I soon found myself engaged to write a weekly gossip column in a leading Sunday paper.

I arrived at the office very green, and for some months I lived in bewilderment. My father, of course, was delighted. He had always impressed upon us all the necessity of earning our own living, but I do not think he had any idea what I had to endure, and I certainly never confided in him.

Sometimes it is not easy to be the child of a famous father.

It is definitely a handicap when you are trying to make your way as a journalist.

To begin with, several people in the office were convinced that I was there for fun, and they made it very clear that they resented my presence. I took the view that I was there to show my father how little I depended upon him, and so, from the very beginning, there was trouble.

It would not have been so bad had I been chosen to do work of which I was capable, but unfortunately, I was chosen to record society chit-chat, and I detested this work.

I think, at this period of my life, that I must have been the worst journalist ever wished on Fleet Street, but I can never adequately express my gratitude to Fleet Street. At least, I learned to write briefly, and I learned to write fast. Those are valuable lessons for any writer.

A journalist cannot afford to be temperamental—there are too many queueing up on the pavement outside the office, and there are few journalists who cannot be replaced at five minutes' notice. One day I was lucky enough to be sent down to Epsom to interview the gypsies just before Derby Day.

I found myself among friends, and I brought back some sort of a story. This story found a certain amount of favour

with the Editor, and from that day onwards I was let, so to speak, a little out of Coventry.

But, unfortunately, it was still my lot to record the doings of society, and I knew about as much of such society as a South Sea Islander. All the same, I held that job for three years at an increasing salary, and when I was at last dismissed, I could only marvel that I had been retained so long. Every year, for instance, I was supposed to write about Ascot; I paid various persons I knew to give me a story. I could not bring myself to go there, and I never went. The Duchess of Westminster contributed for me at that time, and so did Lady Dufferin. I only wish that I could have used their names.

When I had been a year on my Sunday paper I was offered a job as film-critic on another weekly. No work, in those days, was too much for me; I accepted gladly. This, I found, was a job after my own heart.

From then on I was so busy that I scarcely knew what I was doing. Apart from a certain amount of reluctant work for my weekly gossip, I saw films all day and every day. On Saturdays the page was "made-up." I enjoyed the film part of my work so much that the gossip-page naturally suffered.

When I had been working on this Sunday paper for about a year, I found that my colleagues were ready to call a truce with me, and for my part I was willing. They had hitherto regarded me as an amateur, and they were perfectly right. But one day, after some particularly tiring routine work, they suddenly, so to speak, took me to their bosoms, and from then on we were friends. It had taken a year, but it was worth it. People who know nothing of journalists are very ready to abuse them. People who know them better will always, I think, be ready to testify to their loyalty, discretion, and guts. Guts is the right word to use, when discussing journalists; a more refined definition might insult them. They are tough.

Meanwhile I continued to write abominable gossip while my film-page seemed to give universal satisfaction.

I saw a picture of Katharine Hepburn in an American magazine, and, reproducing it after having telephoned to her studio, I ran the first Hepburn story in any English newspaper. I also printed the first English interview with Miss Elisabeth Bergner. This was some weeks before Miss Bergner appeared on the London stage, and I went to see her at the Ritz Hotel because she had invited me to discuss a private matter.

I had never heard Hitler's name mentioned until Miss Bergner, tiny, red-haired, and boyish, said to me.

"I am Jewish, and I had to leave Germany. In a few weeks you will know why."

She wanted me, for reasons best known to herself, to go away with her husband, Dr. Czinner, to write a play for her.

When I told her that this was impossible, as I was under contract to two newspapers, she shook her head and said furiously:

"Child's talk! Child's talk! What you are saying is child's talk!"

I left Miss Bergner in rather strained circumstances, but at the same time I had obtained an interview with her, although this was supposed to be impossible.

I was exceedingly pleased with myself.

THE GREAT CARMO

IT began to seem as though I was to remain a journalist for the rest of my life. I had no particular feelings about it, either one way or another. I was falling into a state of indifference. I was not happy personally, and such dreams as I had once had no longer even troubled me. I suppose I hated journalism, but at least I was making a comfortable income. This is to say that I hated gossip-writing—film-criticism still interested me, although I disliked seeing films at ten o'clock in the morning. But I found gossip-writing insufferable.

It still seems to me somewhat depressing. By publicizing a loathsome clique of advertising nit-wits I felt that I was making myself as bad as these people. I ate because they ignobly revolved in the limelight, and this knowledge made me very bitter. I no longer had the slightest interest in my work, and, child though I was, it seemed to me a century since I had talked so eagerly to John Lane, an eternity since, at the age of nine, I had discovered *Lavengro* in the library at Charlton.

However, once again my life was to change, and for the better. It was time; my work was suffering, and I was becoming so restless that I longed to run away to China, Buenos Aires, or Mexico. I was still so young that security meant less than nothing to me; I did not know, then, that it is the most important thing in life, and I would have thrown up any well-paid job for the chance of adventure.

One day, when I was in this dark, impatient mood, I attended a film lunch given for that excellent actor, Adolphe

Menjou. I was late, and I sat next to an elderly man whose name I did not know.

He said to me :

"Have you seen Olympia Circus?"

"Yes," I said. "I wonder why they engaged Mabel Stark if they weren't going to show her with her tigers?"

He seemed surprised.

"How on earth," he asked me, "do you know Mabel Stark works tigers?"

"Oh, I read a lot about the Circus," I replied airily.

"Really? Does it interest you?"

"Very much."

He looked at me shrewdly.

He was dark, with a vivid, intelligent sort of face.

He said :

"My name's Frederick Martin. I'm connected with Paramount publicity, but I have other interests. I'm just about to put on a tenting show in Ireland. Most of the stuff's at a farm near London. Would it interest you to come down and see a rehearsal?"

Would it interest me? I at once became enthusiastic.

We met the next day, and he offered me an engagement. If I would undertake some articles publicizing the Great Carmo Circus, I would receive a small salary.

"I'll try," I said promptly.

"Fine," he said, "now we'll go down to the farm and have a look round."

We motored down to Middlesex on a cold spring day. The sky was the tint of a blackbird's egg, and a turbulent wind rustled the bare branches of a hundred elm-trees.

When we arrived at the farm we went immediately into a full-sized tent where sixteen horses and ponies began to work under the skilful direction of Captain Ankner. I was enraptured. I talked afterwards to Ankner for about forty minutes. This was my first direct contact with the Circus,

and for the first time since John Lane's death, I was conscious of a passionate interest in the work I was supposed to do.

"Now," said Fred Martin, "we'll go and see the lions. They're not working to-day—it's too cold. They're in the stables."

He threw open a great door, and there I saw an amazing sight.

In a straw-filled den eight huge golden-brown lions lay sleeping. On top of the lions, using them as a careless sofa, sprawled a tawny, half-naked man.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"That's Togare."

"Who's he?"

"Their trainer."

"Can I speak to him?"

"Can you speak German?"

"No."

"I don't think he speaks any other civilized language. He's a Serb—half-Turkish."

"I'd like to try," I persisted.

Whereupon Togare was summoned, and appeared with ill-grace. He was a big, handsome man with slanting eyes and high cheek-bones. He made an indifferent, Eastern salaam, and looked extremely bored.

I did not know that I was meeting for the first time one who was to be a faithful friend. Togare was monosyllabic. I finally discovered that he understood Spanish, and we conducted a halting conversation in this language. Months afterwards, Togare would learn English, and we were to have some interesting experiences tenting, but that was not to be for some time.

When I wrote my first article for the Carmo Circus, I christened Togare "The Valentino of the Ring," and this title still stuck when Valentino was even more of a memory

than in those days. Some years afterwards Togare asked me to invent another title for him. He was then working tigers in Paris, and I suggested that he should be known as Togare, "le Tarzan du Cirque; le fils du jungle." He agreed, and this description met with great success.

"Well," said Fred Martin to me afterwards, "you've seen the rough of the show. How do you feel about it?"

"I never met anything," I said, "that I like more. . . ."

And that was the beginning.

I threw up everything to go off with the Great Carmo Circus. In a few weeks' time I very naturally received my notice from the newspaper for which I was supposed to be recording society gossip. I resigned from my job as film-critic. My father was black with fury, and it was not until much later, when he visited the Circus at Oxford, that he even began to understand the spell beneath which I lived. I had no regular money coming in then, but fortunately I had—for the first and last time in my life—savings, and on these savings I lived. I earned a little money from my Circus articles, but it was not very much.

I can truthfully say that I abandoned all material considerations to wander with the Circus, and this is a step that I have never regretted. I was lucky to have Fred Martin as my friend, for he was one of the best friends I ever had. He would not believe me when I first told him that I had decided to throw in my lot with the show. When he finally understood that I meant what I said, he took me beneath his wing, and began to teach me something of this business that so much fascinated me. I suppose that Fred knew more about the Circus than anyone else I have ever met. I say this because his knowledge was not only commercial and practical; the whole history of the Circus was at his finger-tips.

I roamed all over the British Isles with the Great Carmo Circus. Sometimes I lived in hotels, sometimes in "digs"

with clowns and ballet-girls, and sometimes—these were red-letter days—in wagons that were lent to me.

But I did not very much care where I lived.

So long as I might wander in to the Big Top to watch practice, so long as I might watch the performances at the ring entrance, I was utterly, blissfully happy. I have often heard that circus people are cold and reserved with outsiders, whom they call "flatties," but I must honestly say that they have always been friendly to me. I am, naturally, not talking about my own friends of many years' standing, but about artists I have encountered only for a few weeks, or a few days, in various English and Continental circuses. One and all, they made me welcome. I feel more at home with circus artists than with people of any other kind.

The only rebuff I ever had was from a Prussian equestrian-director in a tiny show. I applied to him for a chance to ride in place of a girl who had broken her ribs.

He took an extremely bad view of this request.

"Get out of here!" he said, and then, relenting, "well, if you've got an evening-dress—maybe you can try making an entrance with the elephant!"

I was so much annoyed by his manner that I even refused the elephant, although I have since "made an entrance" with sea-lions.

I studied riding a horse standing up, and had many falls. When you fall at practice in the Circus, you pay a shilling fine to the groom who attends to your horse. The grooms were always delighted when they heard that I was practising.

I think I am right in saying that the Great Carmo Circus was on the road for three years. The second year produced some interesting personalities.

Laura Knight came down to paint. She lived in "digs" with Joe Burt, the clown, and his wife. The artists were devoted to her, but oddly enough I never met her in those days. We had different friends in the show, and we only

stared rather shyly at one another. Two years later, Bertram Mills brought us together.

Meanwhile, two extremely good-looking young men arrived—"to learn the business." They were Bertram's sons, Cyril and Bernard. I only knew them well enough to say "Good morning." It was not until after Fred Martin's death that my friendship with the Mills family came to mean so much to me.

RUSSIAN BALLET

ONE day, rummaging about the stables, I saw Pat Baker sleeping in a stall with the Bakers' "rosin-back" mare, Lizzie, who was part of the family. Pat was about thirteen, then, but he looked ten. He was a beautiful child, slim and sunburnt, with a mass of curling golden hair. He had been born and bred in the Circus.

I wondered, as I watched him, what sort of future he would have—he was already a brilliant bareback-rider.

Musing thus, I made some notes that evening, and it was then that I started to write *Red Wagon*, my first published novel.

Fortunately for me, that same Christmas, I met Mr. George Sanger, of Sanger's Circus, and he seemed to me one of the finest types of English Circus man. I wondered, then, whether little Pat Baker, with his swift, youthful beauty, would ever develop into the sturdy, gallant, undaunted circus proprietor represented by George Sanger. It seemed to me so probable that I based my chief character, "Joe Prince," on a sort of amalgamation of these two personalities.

I introduced a gypsy heroine out of cussedness. None of my non-circus friends would ever believe that the Circus and the gypsies are poles apart. I thought I would show them, with *Red Wagon*, which, incidentally, started life under the cumbersome title of "The White Top." So I made my circus proprietor ruin his professional reputation for his gypsy wife.

Meanwhile, although I was writing a novel, I was earning no money, and since I had no intention of asking my father

for an allowance, I was forced to leave the Circus for a few months. I was lucky enough to obtain another job as film-critic, but I was not destined to keep it for very long.

My interest in Ballet had never declined, and when Lady Juliet Duff was kind enough to introduce me into Diaghileff's circle, I found another vivid interest. Diaghileff, I suppose, was already in his decline; that is to say that his major works already belonged to the past, but I do not ever remember meeting a more dynamic personality.

Physically, he was a large, grey block of a man. He had a curious mannerism; whenever he was interested in anything he would munch, as though he were chewing gum, but he wasn't; it was just a nervous habit. In those days his intimate circle included Serge Lifar, the dancer; Anton Dolin, and Boris Kochno, author of many ballets. They were young, and trying their wings; so was I; we soon became friends, and my friendship with all three has endured faithfully until to-day.

At night, eating supper in the Savoy Grill, Diaghileff held forth in a witty, sardonic way. He could be very funny indeed, in a dry manner, but when he talked of the things he loved, he burst into a dazzling, glittering enthusiasm, holding everyone captive by the fascination of his talk. Although he was supposed to care only for the ultra-modern, I believe that this was more or less a pose with him; a pose necessary owing to the creative decline, at that time, of the Ballet, that had been so great, and that was so soon to be great again.

Diaghileff himself was too big a man not to know that his works, at this period, were more or less produced "*pour épater les bourgeois*." He always said that his favourite ballet was "*Les Sylphides*," and his favourite composer was Tchaikovsky. Yet he experimented, he had to; it was expected of him, and he experimented audaciously. But I think he had his tongue in his cheek.

He produced, at this period, among many other ballets, "La Chatte", "Les Biches", "Aphrodite", "Fils Prodigue", "Renard" and "Le Bal." There was great merit in some of these ballets, particularly in "Fils Prodigue" and "La Chatte", but, of course, compared to the magnificent, undying Fokine and Massine ballets, their influence was naturally of minor importance.

I was allowed to attend rehearsals, and I was always intrigued by the terror exercised by Diaghileff on his company. He would sit, grey-faced, munching, in the stalls, or in his own box, and in those days he resembled nothing so much as the Wizard in *Petroushka*, who dangled all the puppets from wires. I believe he knew more about lighting than any other producer; he would sit all night at his lighting rehearsals, and the results were extraordinary. He was such a martinet that he would not, for many years, allow his ballerinas to cut their hair. I know this sounds incredible, but it is true.

It is the fashion, nowadays, to regard Diaghileff as the bogey-man in Nijinsky's story; a sadist who contributed largely to his friend's insanity. While I am not defending Diaghileff's morals—which are no affair of mine—it is safe to say that Diaghileff in no way contributed to Nijinsky's disease. Nor did Diaghileff treat Nijinsky as certain persons would have us believe. He was hard and relentless, but he was certainly never the monster he has since his death been painted.

One afternoon Serge Lifar asked me to come with him to a matinée Pavlova was giving in Golder's Green. He had stalls, but there was some confusion, and when we arrived there were no seats to be had. Serge flew into a rage, and stormed into Pavlova's dressing-room. She was so much annoyed to learn of this mistake that she picked up half a dozen pairs of pink ballet slippers and threw them at her manager. The result was that Serge and I were allowed to



SERGE LIFAR

stand in the wings to watch her dance, and while he continued to sulk, I could think of nothing that would have pleased me more.

Pavlova came down to dance the "Swan." She was wrapped in a shabby grey dressing-gown, and she looked drawn and old. She was followed by a maid, bearing a huge powder puff and a glass of water. She stood at the side, rubbing her feet in resin. She seemed irritable and nervous.

Suddenly she threw off the dressing-gown, and stood revealed in the white, fluffy "tutu" and flesh-coloured tights with which she will always be associated. Quite suddenly, as the music swelled, and she glided onto the stage, she cast off twenty years, and then she was a girl again. She was young, lissom, and lovely.

When the "Swan" was finished she took a number of calls in her own inimitable way. The stage was piled with brilliant bouquets, but the sweat continued to pour down Pavlova's face. When at last the curtain was rung down she came across to her maid, and it was impossible not to notice how painful was her breathing. She sipped some water, and the maid wrapped her in her dressing-gown. It was odd to notice how, when she put on this grey garment, she lost all illusion of youth and became haggard once more, with drooping shoulders and tired eyes.

She said to me, in French :

"Surely we have met before?"

But I was quite certain about that.

"Oh, no, Madame; I would not have forgotten if we had!"

She went off to her dressing-room, a little, lonely figure; she was followed by her maid, and her maid was followed by various flunkeys almost staggering beneath the weight of the flowers they carried.

I thought :

"One day I must write about this!"

I did; I wrote a book called *Ballerina*, but I wrote it later, and in any case, the book was not entirely based upon Pavlova's art, only on that last sad impression of a tired woman and of a divine artist.

Two other great dancers—Shura Danilova and Alicia Markova—contributed, unconsciously, to the technical side of *Ballerina*.

Pavlova never danced again in London. She died a few months afterwards. Diaghileff died almost at the same time. He died in Venice, a week before I was supposed to go to stay with him.

It may easily be imagined into what desolation his death cast Lifar and Kochno. They returned to Paris, lost, forlorn, and unemployed. Lady Juliet Duff asked me if I would go with her to Paris and see what could be done to make them less distraught.

I agreed, and caught the 'plane after having done a dreadful thing regarding my film contract. I reviewed a film without ever having seen it. I had, however, read a review in an American magazine, and I went off feeling quite happy. Little did I know that this film was postponed, so that the English press had not seen it at the time of my departure. I was to return to find myself dismissed, and owing to circumstances over which I had no control, *Red Wagon* was to be finished sooner than I would ever have believed possible.

We arrived in Paris to find Serge and Boris in deep mourning and looking desperately unhappy. They were pinched and tired, and seemed about twelve years old. We tried to divert them, but owing to some complicated system of mourning current in the Orthodox Church, it appeared that they were not allowed to visit a cinema for forty days.

However, this did not seem to prevent them from going every night to Luna Park. Here we rode on switchbacks

and water-chutes, and gazed for hours at an imposing array of freaks. I think Boris will agree that his ballet, "Luna Park," was directly inspired by these evenings.

Soon matters were to have a happy ending, for that great showman, C. B. Cochran, engaged Serge, Boris, and Alice Nikitina for his next revue.

That is, there was to be a happy ending for everyone but me, for when I returned to London I had no job and no money, only the unwieldy, unfinished manuscript that I began to think of as *Red Wagon*.

RED WAGON

RED WAGON was refused by two well-known firms of publishers. If I had known this at the time, I would probably have burned it, as I had burned earlier efforts, but, fortunately for myself, I knew nothing of its varied fortunes until it was accepted for publication by the firm of Gollancz.

I felt no particular elation when first I learned of its acceptance.

The reason for this was that I had begun to regard myself as hopelessly incompetent. I had held three excellent journalistic positions, and from two of them I had been dismissed. I was in a low, gloomy state of mind. Quite apart from my work, nothing had gone well with me for some months, and I could not believe that I would ever be anything better than a precocious failure. I thought of the Circus with a wave of home-sickness, and wondered how soon it would be before I could return to the life that I loved so much.

So certain was I of the failure of my book, that it was with the greatest reluctance, on the eve of publication, that I informed my family of my new venture.

My mother was sympathetic, but I cannot say the same of my father. I made her break the awful news to him, and sure enough, when I came home after dinner, he was sitting in the library, the door open, waiting to pounce on me.

The library of Grosvenor Gardens was a great, long room, lined with books, usually heated by two roaring fires.

My father, dressed in a plum-coloured dinner-jacket, was

prowling up and down this room, chewing a cigar, gesticulating violently, when I made a furtive and guilty-looking entrance.

He wasted no time.

"What the devil is this story of a novel?"

"I've got one published," I said, in what was meant to be a conciliatory tone of voice.

"Quite. And do you know *why* you've succeeded in getting a novel published?"

"No," I admitted truthfully, for I had not, indeed, the faintest idea.

"I'll tell you," said my father, in a soft, purring voice that boded no good for anyone, "you've got a novel published simply because you happen to be my daughter . . . for that, and for no other reason!"

"That's not true," said I, stung, and as a matter of fact, it was not true, but my father took a different view.

"Your conceit," he continued, "must be overweening . . . how otherwise could you presume to publish a novel without consulting your own father?"

I began to reply, but he gave me no time.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "your father's brain appears to you so inferior that the idea of asking him for assistance seems to you faintly ludicrous? However, you will bitterly rue this day, and that must be your punishment——"

"Listen," I interrupted, "I'm sick, as it is, of people supposing that you help me with my work. If I'd shown you the proofs of my novel, and if you'd wanted to correct them—which you certainly would have wanted to do—people would only have said you'd written it for me. Thanks! That wouldn't have been much fun for either of us!"

"You talk like a fool," said my father, "and your folly lies in the fact that I believe you to have a certain talent for writing. At the moment, however, if I died to-morrow,

you'd never get another job . . . that is why I find your tomfoolery exasperating—already you've been dismissed from reputable newspapers because you insist upon gallivanting over England with travelling circuses! And now——”

I interrupted him.

“Why do you think I like that sort of thing?”

“Because you're unstable!”

“Your grandmother Bathsheba would understand what I mean!” I declared furiously, and left the library, slamming the door in a fit of rage. It seemed to me that everything was black enough without my father scolding me for trying to do some independent work. I was insulted and hurt. I proceeded to avoid him.

The next day his secretary, C. Bechhofer Roberts, himself a successful writer, to whom I had shown my proofs, said:

“You've got a winner.”

I thought that he was trying to be kind.

When *Red Wagon* appeared it was an immediate success, and I can honestly say that no one was more surprised than I was. It still seems to me astonishing that the public should so much have enjoyed this rather technical account of the vicissitudes of a humble circus proprietor. I was, in fact, a somewhat bewildered best-seller, but I continued to regard my father with an air of reproachful dignity.

One day, however, he called me abruptly into the library, and I obeyed this summons reluctantly, and with what I believed to be an air of hauteur.

My father said:

“I'm delighted by your success—really delighted! Winston was here yesterday, and he thinks your book remarkable—he's writing you a letter!”

My coldness was not proof against this, and I felt myself glowing.

“Oh, Pop, is he really?”



OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

My father began fishing in his pocket.

"While I still think," he said, "that you will have trouble in living up to this success, I must admit that I'm proud of you, and to mark the occasion, I've brought you this little present. . . ."

He slipped into my hand a splendid brooch of rubies and diamonds. This brooch was in the form of a caravan; the rubies formed the wagon body; the diamonds, the wheel spokes and window.

This was typical of my father.

He would exasperate one to unreasoning fury, and then, suddenly, with one swift, disarming gesture, he would plan, with his childish love of secrecy, some surprise that gave him as much pleasure as it gave to the recipient.

I was enchanted with my brooch; it never occurred to me that this was the last present my father would ever give me.

I began now to write short stories, and I succeeded in placing them, but my mind was already seething with an idea for another novel. This novel was to be based on the influence of Spanish gypsy blood, and it was to be dominated by the Spanish gypsy music that had so much impressed me when I was in Spain. It was, of course, to be called *Flamenco*, and I began it immediately.

In the meantime, I accompanied my father on a whirlwind lecture-tour of America, during the course of which we both of us succeeded in being publicly censured by the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

The circumstances were these: we were established for twenty-four hours in a somewhat gloomy town with the misleadingly adventurous name of Sioux City. During the afternoon, some austere ladies insisted upon my paying a visit of inspection to some female college in the neighbourhood. After more than an hour's dismal dissipation over the tea-cups I took my departure. I was longing for a cigarette,

and I had not been offered one; in the car I took out my case, and began to smoke. Not a word was said by the ladies, my companions, and it was only some days later that I gathered I had been reported, and censured, by this mysterious body with which hitherto I was unacquainted.

My father, who had lectured in a Methodist chapel, was accused, quite untruly, of "bandying liquor in the crypt."

His reply was typical.

"Had I," he said, "been offered refreshment either in the crypt or anywhere else in Sioux City, I would no doubt have been glad enough to avail myself of such an invitation. Unfortunately, it was never proffered."

Photographs of us both, with the words "How Shocking!" splashed across the top, eventually reached England, where the family thought we were doing them little enough credit.

It was in another Middle-Western town that my father and his secretary decided to play tennis against two college-boys. These boys were superior players, and my father was not always a jovial loser. Our hostess suddenly sprinted towards the swimming-pool where I was amusing myself.

"Lady Smith! Lady Smith! Is it etiquette for the Earl to be beaten at tennis? Because he is being—badly!"

I spent all too short a time in New York, where I was fascinated by almost everything, from the vitality of the people to the brilliance of the contemporary theatre; by the excellence of the food, in even the most modest restaurants, to the vivid, colourful nomads of the East Side, where I found some splendid gypsy types.

I returned home, to resume work on *Flamenco*, and shortly afterwards we heard that my father, who was holidaying in Biarritz, had been attacked by a sudden hæmorrhage.

•

MY FATHER

WE went at once to Biarritz, where my father lay seriously ill.

His brother-in-law, Claude Furneaux, walked into his bedroom one evening to discover him in a desperate condition.

He was completely calm.

"Claude," he said, "I think I'm done for. . . ."

He was, however, wrong; he was ill for weeks, but at last he recovered, although he looked strangely gaunt and grey, and he went off to recuperate at Charlton.

But he never again recovered his full vigour. He had, all his life, been unsparing of himself, and although he was inclined to fuss over minor ailments, he was always supremely careless of his health—perhaps because, all his life, he had had such a prodigal amount of it. He was a man of colossal strength and unlimited endurance. He had been accustomed for years to work too hard, and play too hard; even his astonishing constitution was not equal to the demands imposed upon it.

He died of pneumonia in London, after a long, weary illness.

At the exact moment of his death, his Cairn terrier, "Jane," sprang from the chair on which she had been sleeping and uttered a strange, desolate howl. It was like no sound made by a dog before; it resembled the shriek of a despairing soul, and we knew at once that he was dead.

I often think my father was born out of the century to which, by character, he should have belonged—the late

eighteenth century. I can see him so clearly as a Regency buck; and, indeed, it is not only the dress of the period that would have become so well his tall, athletic figure, his olive skin, his dark, heavy-lidded eyes, his disdainful, rather imperious manner. His tastes were the robust ones of this time; he loved horses, hunting, and gambling; he was prepared to bet on anything—an impromptu steeplechase, a throw of dice, a cut of the cards. He liked to be considered indifferent to dress, but I never thought he was; every day he ordered a button-hole, and in many respects there was much of the dandy about him.

He loved ostentation, and he could never keep money.

He had three cars, all painted buttercup-yellow; his stables were filled with horses some of which he had never ridden, but he loved his yacht, *Mairi*, more than any of these. He would put across the Channel in a storm, and miraculously arrive, to saunter into Deauville Casino, where he would sit all night at the big baccarat table. The next morning he would depart as mysteriously as he had arrived, and that same afternoon be seated, inscrutable and stern, upon the Woolsack.

His sarcastic tongue concealed a warmly sentimental heart, but his enemies were not to know that, and he was a man who often, through thoughtlessness, made enemies. These people conceived of him as Satan, a cold-blooded, sneering devil who recognized only the "glittering prizes" to be won by "sharp swords." The pity is that none of them ever took the trouble properly to read this famous speech. Had they done so, they would have realized that this particular, oft-quoted sentence means, undivorced from its context, something entirely different to the popular supposition.

My father had one great grief in life. This was the premature death of his beloved younger brother, Harold Smith. In spite of his great powers of resilience, he never really

recovered from this blow. Harold Smith died at his home, on the way to Banbury, and never again, on his way to the golf-course or the station, would my father pass this house. He preferred to drive out of his way.

He loved feminine society, but he detested feminists. He disliked women who tried to talk "up" to him, and when he was bored, which was seldom, he was incapable of concealing his boredom.

He was recklessly courageous.

When he visited Dublin, in spite of remonstrances from most of his friends, he was a hunted man, and he knew it. But he refused to ride in an armoured car, and, to the despair of his unfortunate detectives, he insisted upon taking his dog "Jane" for a walk in Phoenix Park. Gunmen were following him, but no shot was fired. Afterwards he strolled down one of the main streets, looking into the windows of all the book shops. Nothing happened.

Some time afterwards, one of these gunmen was arrested, for some other offence, by one of the same Scotland Yard detectives. Referring to my father's visit, the gunman said:

"I could have pumped that black devil full of lead any time I wanted."

"Why didn't you then?"

"Oh . . . what the hell? He was a grand fellow—he didn't care a damn!"

I can remember, as a child, seeing a tired, dusty man standing in the hall of Grosvenor Gardens. Some stupid butler had left him there, and he said to me in a soft voice:

"Are you F. E.'s little girl? Do you think I could see your father?"

"He's out," I said, "but mother's in. What's your name?"

He gave me a card printed in what I then supposed to be Chinese characters. I ran into the sitting-room.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed my mother, "it must be Michael Collins! Bring him in at once."

It was Collins, and I brought him in to her.

When they signed the Treaty, my father said to Collins, for whom he had a great respect.

"Mr. Collins, in signing this Treaty I'm signing my political death-warrant."

Michael Collins answered softly:

"Lord Birkenhead, I'm signing my actual death-warrant. . . ."

Shortly afterwards he was assassinated.

I recollect my father saying:

"If I'm remembered as a statesman, it will be because of the Irish Treaty. . . ."

When my father was at Charlton, he played eighteen holes of golf every morning. In the afternoons he played tennis, and after tea he rode a couple of hours. I don't think he ever went to bed before two o'clock, and he was called every morning at eight.

One of his favourite companions was Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. Nowadays many men are described as witty, but I do not remember hearing any one of them make a witty remark. Perhaps I was spoilt. In any case, my father and Ashmead-Bartlett must have been an extraordinary pair. They talked, or rather argued, for about three hours every night; they were both exponents of a brilliant, glittering wit that was bright and hard as diamonds; their words had wings; their tongues were as swift as their minds. On many occasions they differed violently; I recollect an argument on the Battle of Waterloo that broke up in sad disorder; they stalked off to bed majestically refusing to compose their differences, but in the morning two notes of apology were placed on two morning tea-trays, and they were as brothers until they met on the golf-course, where Ashmead discovered that the village idiot had mischievously been allotted to him as caddy.

I have always asserted that my father was at his best



KING GEORGE V AND HIS MINISTERS

with young people, and it is certain that he was usually able to hold them captive. When Freddie and I took our friends to Charlton they would at first be timid, but never for long; I suppose it was his sense of humour, his simplicity, or perhaps his genuine interest in their point of view. In any case, his charm was never more apparent than when he was talking to his children's friends, and if he was worshipped by them as a hero, he was no less appreciated as a friend to whom they might take their troubles, confident of obtaining sympathetic advice.

His temper was hot and violent, but it never lasted long; he swore robustly when he was in a rage, but he had a horror of coarse stories, and nobody could rebuke impropriety more icily than he.

But he could be extremely rude when irritated.

- One night, at dinner, a particularly truculent feminist, determined at all costs to pick an argument, exclaimed angrily:

"You're impossible, F. E.! You don't even talk to me like a gentleman!"

"Talk to you like a gentleman! My dear Lady X——, you wouldn't understand me if I did!"

But he enjoyed anything that he found richly comic.

Once he was staying in Germany with a well-known industrialist. They drove back after golf to this person's house, where, as the door was opened by a pretty parlour-maid, a spaniel puppy came frisking out to welcome the party.

"What a charming little bitch!" exclaimed my father, always a dog-lover.

"Isn't she?" agreed his host, delighted. "She's my chauffeur's wife. . . ."

My father had a curious kink, for one so extravagant. He really hated sending one of his cars even two miles to the station. The same applied to his horses, which were always over-fed and under-exercised. But the dislike of

using his cars became a mania, and he was quite capable of sending, as the lesser evil, two horses to the station, where, as often as not, they met some unfortunate person who had not ridden for years, and who was in any case scarcely dressed for hacking.

"I tell you," he would say, furiously, "I won't have my cars sent trapesing about all over the country. . . ."

But he filled his house with guests, and they were always made to play tennis. Once Norman Brooks, ex-champion of the world, came down to stay for the first time, and within half an hour found himself participating in an extraordinary doubles match consisting of the King of Greece, my father, and Rainbow, the gardener.

"I couldn't quite make out who anyone was," said Norman Brooks afterwards. "You see, when people called the King of Greece 'sir,' I began to realize who *he* was, but when my partner addressed me as 'sir,' I didn't know where *I* was—nobody ever explained to me about the gardener. . . ."

Lili de Alvarez was another frequent visitor. She never seemed to have any tennis clothes or racquets, and borrowed everything from Freddie and myself. She was once severely censured at Cromer for dressing as a boy and entering the men's singles under an assumed name. She was accused of "treating tennis lightly." Perhaps it was because she considers other matters to be of greater importance that she will always remain in one's mind as the most beautiful tennis player ever seen. Had Lili been physically stronger, she would have been the great Suzanne's logical successor, but all the same I am not sure; she is too gifted a creature ever to have concentrated upon any one sport.

So many people came to Charlton . . . Margaret Kennedy wrote of a character in one of her novels: "He'd ask the Pope to stay, if he ever met the Pope!" and this was so like my father that I saved it for Freddie.

One has only to read the visitors' book that lies on a table in the same library where I first discovered Borrow.

King George VI, the Prince of Wales—who rode in a point-to-point nearby—Winston, Lloyd George, Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Carson, Maxine Elliott—greatest beauty of her epoch—Elsie Janis and her mother, A. J. Munnings, Georges Carpentier, Sir John Lavery and the lovely “Hazel,” Sacheverell Sitwell, Sir John Simon, George Robey, Lord Chief Justice Hewart, Serge Lifar, “Bunny” Austin, Jessie Matthews . . . to name only a few.

Sometimes my father asked so many people for the weekend that there was nowhere for them to sleep, and then my mother would expostulate, but without success.

“What nonsense!” he would exclaim, “you forget all those bedrooms on the top floor. . . .”

These bedrooms, needless to explain, existed only in his own imagination.

What can one say of a man who derived exquisite fun from taking his small daughter to Willie Clarkson's, where, after putting a flaxen wig upon her head, he caused her cheeks to be grotesquely painted, then escorted her, gravely, upon a series of solemn, legal afternoon calls?

What can one say of a man who, as Lord Chancellor, could run midnight races with undergraduates round Tom Quad at Christchurch, and yet maintain, upon the Wool-sack, an awful, petrifying dignity? Who, sitting on that same Woolsack, would close his heavy lids, and seem to sleep, so that his friends despaired, and then, opening languid eyes, would deliver, coldly, judgments so great that they shattered his contemporaries and will live for ever in legal history?

A man who could say, passionately:

“I tell you Ethel le Neve was innocent of Mrs. Crippen's murder! Why didn't I put her in the box? Don't talk nonsense! It wasn't necessary! I got her off—I tell you she was innocent!”

Or:

"I sincerely believe, had I been Mrs. Thompson's counsel, she would have been acquitted. . . ."

A man who, pacing up and down his wife's room at five o'clock in the morning, drawn and tired, could say:

"I'd give anything in the world to find Archdeacon Wakeford innocent, but I can't! I can't—I never had a case that troubled me so much!"

What can one say of a man who, while frankly loving the bright, ephemeral things of life, found true peace only with his family? A man who, condemned by his enemies as a rake, depended so much on domesticity that, without his wife, he would have been for ever lost?

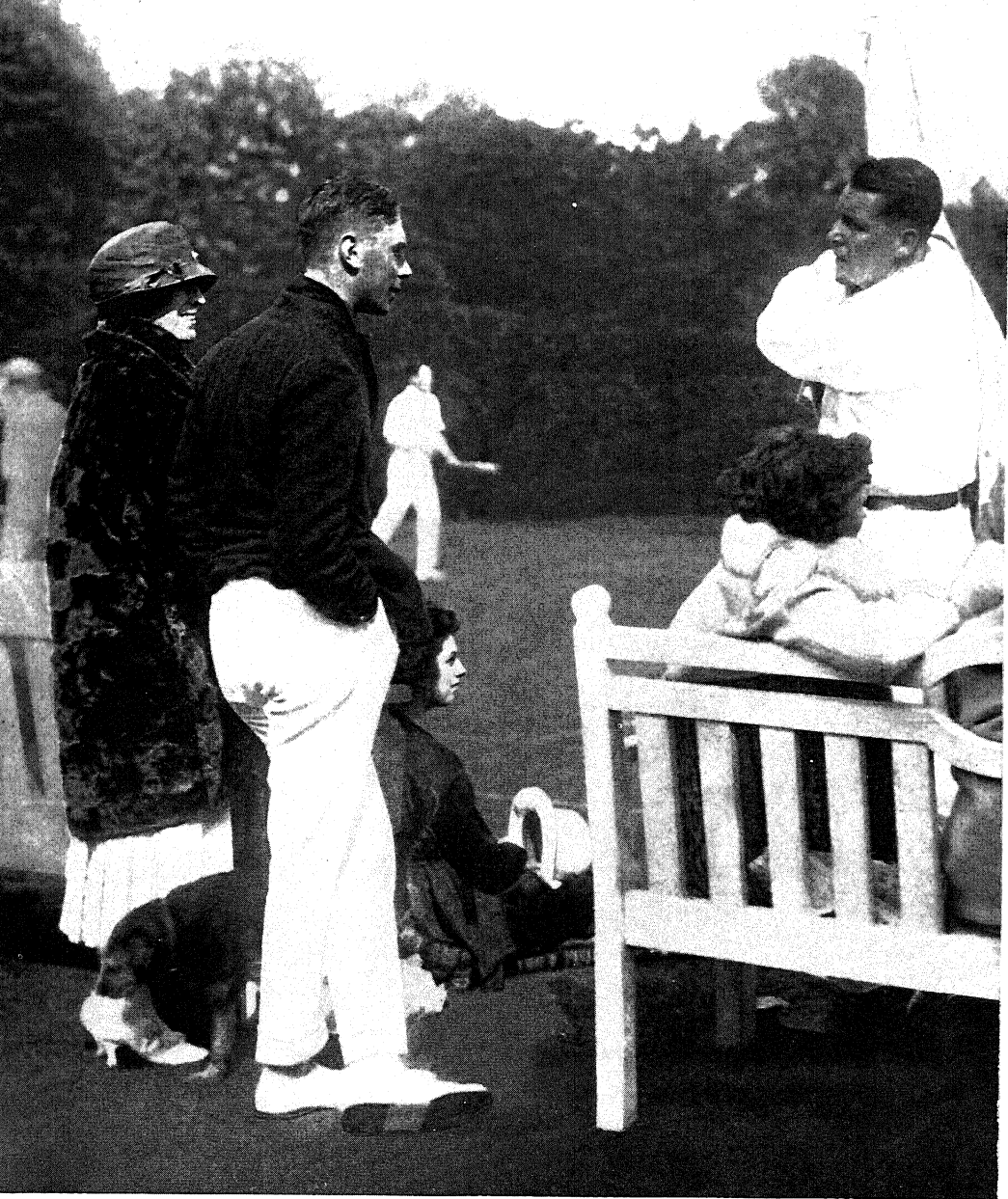
I do not suppose that any man in the world was ever a greater mass of contradictions.

It was rightly said of him that he could see no good in an enemy, no bad in a friend. He was harsh, sentimental, emotional, and controlled. He hated as passionately as he loved. He adored beauty, but was pitiful of ugliness. He was impatient, intolerant, and irritable. He very often hurt people's feelings without knowing in the least that he had done so. He was generous to a fault. He liked all people who had made their own way in the world, and he detested snobbery. The people he liked best were those who made him laugh, but this laughter was reserved for his private life, and he execrated judges who made jokes in court. He would say:

"Every case is serious for someone."

As a judge, he himself was cold, thoughtful, and implacable.

Happily married, he felt strongly about Divorce Law Reform, and he made a great and moving speech on this question. Another tremendous speech was that which dedicated the Indian War Memorial in France. On this occasion he stood in front of Foch and Kipling, and I recollect that he dominated both of them.



KING GEORGE VI (WHEN DUKE OF YORK) AT CHARLTON

Sometimes, however, when he dictated his articles, they were sadly careless, although he resented criticism. But his extravagance was incredible, and so was his nervous courage.

One day, a short time before his death, he was lent a half-broken colt, and while riding this animal, was dared to jump a very solid five-barred gate. He put the colt at this obstacle without hesitation, and it refused. To his fury, he "cut a voluntary." I have never seen a man in such a temper. Remounting immediately he beat this young horse over the gate. But he was terrified of going near the dentist.

He adored his children, but he was inclined to gloom when he considered their future. I suppose he realized then that he would never leave us any money. He hated feminists because he said that they were always unattractive to look at. At the same time, he thought it important that girls should learn to earn their living. Perhaps he knew then that his daughters would be left to their own resources. He could not forgive a woman for being dowdy. On the other hand, he could be very stern indeed about the dressmakers' bills of his own family.

He was intensely proud of being what he called an "adventurer." He certainly resembled a character from the pages of Dumas.

He was a great man, and that shall be his epitaph.

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GYPSIES IN A CAVE

MY father died leaving no money to his family, but he left us a rich legacy of friends collected from every imaginable walk of life. We left Grosvenor Gardens to settle in Chester Street, and then we went off to Spain and Africa on a yacht lent us by Mr. Reginald Purbrick. The party consisted of my mother, my Aunt Joan, her young son, Anthony, Vyvyan Holland, Freddie, Pam and myself.

Unfortunately, on the trip out, the boy Anthony saw fit to contract measles, subsequently presenting this loathsome ailment to his mother and to Pam, with the result that we were quarantined for weeks in Barcelona. He first became sick and spotty in some little town just after we had left Africa for Spain, and when it was discovered that he was feverish, the village doctor was sent for, and I was asked to interpret.

The doctor, an unshaven young man in a greeny-black suit, for some time listened intently to the boy's breathing through a species of large, wooden toy trumpet, while I waited apprehensively, for I was convinced that he had caught smallpox in Tetuan.

After several agonizing minutes the doctor looked up, shrugged his shoulders, and pronounced the one awful word, "sarampion." There were beads of sweat on my forehead as I tore through the pages of my dictionary, and I never thought I should feel almost affectionately disposed towards the measles when at last I discovered what the word meant. We decided to push on as fast as we could towards Barcelona and civilization, but it took us longer

than we thought, for we encountered several gales on the way.

One night, when we were lying outside Almeria, I saw a cluster of gypsy caves on a hill outside the town, and at once decided to visit them. Freddie and Pam insisted on coming too, and, try as I would, I could not shake them off in the town, although I had not evinced the slightest desire for their company.

We soon found ourselves on a dusty, winding road that led apparently to a mountain-top. This road was pitted with holes, fringed with crags of rock, and deserted save for a number of wild, angry-looking little black goats. I thought of George Borrow's *Bible in Spain*, and of his unparalleled impudence in trying to convert the Spaniards, while behind me Freddie and Pam grumbled loudly about the road, the hill, the goats, and the dust.

We turned a corner and found ourselves in the gypsy village. Here the rocks were honeycombed with caves, and huddled with low, tumble-down huts. The air was thick with smoke, and echoed with the shrill barking of dogs, the bleating of more goats, and the predatory cries of gypsy children. A horde of these same children descended upon us in a squealing avalanche. They were naked, grimy, and tousled.

"Pennee! Pennee!"

I pushed my way through them as best I could.

Behind, I heard Freddie's angry voice addressing me:

"Will you kindly make these damned children go away?"

Reluctant to admit that what he asked was beyond my powers, I replied pompously:

"My business is not with them."

I then found myself confronting the adults of the tribe.

Spanish gypsies of the less sophisticated variety, that is to say, those who do not often encounter tourists, are remarkably sullen and forbidding of aspect. They beg, as the

Spaniards say, with a curse. The gypsies of Almeria were no exception to this rule. The men stood there glowering, arms akimbo, cigarettes hanging from their lips, scowling ferociously. The women were, as usual, more sinister than the men. The gypsy women of Almeria were naked to the waist; they trailed gaudy rags, and most of them were cradling babies to their hanging, dusky breasts. Their black hair hung like horses' tails over their eyes, and their eyes glared with a hatred that made them appear more like wild animals than human beings. They were certainly not a prepossessing group, and to add to the general discomfort of the visit, the short day was nearly over, for the climb up the hill had taken longer than I had supposed.

While I am the first to admit that the Romani language is an Open Sesame to the hearts of gypsies, I may say that I deem it prudent, when visiting strange encampments for the first time, also to arm myself with some form of liquid refreshment. On this occasion I had taken the precaution of buying some Fundador brandy in the town, and the bottle was tucked firmly beneath my arm. I said, with a boldness I was far from feeling, in a mixture of Spanish and *Caló*:

"Who's the boss here? I've come a long way to find him, and to ask him if he will drink with us."

Behind me, the expostulations of Freddie and Pam were becoming even more indignant, for by this time the gypsy brats were pinching them, and jumping up to pull Pam's hair.

A short, ruffianly-looking man with a fearful squint and abnormally long arms, now said sulkily, without moving:

"I'm the boss here. What do you want?"

"I've come across the seas," said I, "to visit the gypsies of Almeria as a friend."

"What do you want of the gypsies of Almeria?"

"I want to talk of affairs of Egypt. I would like also to offer some Fundador to you and to your family."

There was a long pause, broken by an ear-splitting scream from Pam, and an oath from Freddie, after which the ruffian said, ungraciously:

"*Viene aquí*, then. Come into this cave, and we will see."

As I followed him, Pam and Freddie suddenly lost all control. Instead of following us, they broke violently away from their tormentors and began to run down the hill as fast as they could. They could scarcely have done anything more foolish. The gypsy children, whooping joyously, dashed in immediate pursuit, naturally running very much faster than their prey, and they were joined in the hunt by about twenty yelping dogs and fifteen plunging goats. I heard yells, screams, barking, curses, grow fainter and gradually die away in the distance.

I learned afterwards that when they arrived in the town, limping and dishevelled, the story they told was that they had run away because "Eleanor was having her throat cut in a gypsy cave," and they thought there was still "time to save her life." This story, like themselves, was very properly discredited when they were shortly afterwards observed peacefully drinking coffee in a bar.

Meanwhile, I found myself sitting in a low, dark room hewn out of the rock. There was scarcely any furniture, only a table and stools, but there were mattresses and eider-downs piled upon the floor. There were electric-fittings in the cave, but they did not seem to be working, and a woman brought two stumps of candles to put upon the table. She also brought a varied collection of cups and glasses. I produced the brandy and emptied my cigarette case upon the table. By this time the cave was full of dusky, staring faces, and the smell of unwashed human flesh was somewhat overpowering.

"I want to hear some *flamenco* music," said I to my host.

He shook his head.

"You should have come yesterday. There is no *tocaor*

here to-day. But yesterday we had a feast. For an *angellillo*."

"What is an *angellillo*?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"A dead child. Here, when a little one dies, we dress it in its best, put much paint and powder on its face, and sit it up in a chair while everyone sings and dances before it is put in the earth. . . ."

"*Chachipen*, that's true," screeched a red-eyed old hag, swigging out of the brandy bottle and wiping her mouth with a hand like a claw, "the soul of the little one escapes like a bird, so what's the use of the mother blubbering, say I? Make the most of it, make a *festa* for the child—that's the best thing to do! And I, who am talking to you, I've borne eight, and seen three of them *angellillos*, so I should know what I'm saying!"

"Shut your mouth, and put that bottle down," growled my host, whose name was Mattos.

At this moment, from outside in the dusk, a voice pierced the air like a thread of silver. It was the voice of someone singing a flamenco *copla*, and it was a sound so disembodied that it was as though the soul of the little *angellillo* had returned to sing to his people. The voice was pure and sexless as an angel's, sweet as a thrush's, clearer than the sound of running water. It rose and fell in a stream of loveliness.

"I must see this boy," said I to myself.

Unnoticed by the other gypsies, who were now arguing furiously, I slipped out of the cave. I had not far to look for the singer, who, as though exhausted, was leaning against the rocks opposite.

The singer was not a boy, but a middle-aged woman, and she was drunk.

She was leaning against the rocks because she could no longer walk. She wore a bedraggled shawl and a dirty petticoat. Her greasy hair was falling down, and her face was seamed and lined with debauchery. Her eyes glittered

like a serpent's, and her bodice was torn. She was pregnant. So much for the *angellillo*, the little angel.

"Will you sing again?" I asked her.

But she looked at me stupidly, without comprehending. She laughed, and staggered when she tried to move. I thought she would fall down.

Such are gypsies.

I went on my way.

BARCELONA AFTER DARK

WE eventually found our way down to Barcelona. I was so much annoyed with Freddie and Pam for their monstrous behaviour in Almeria that I revenged myself, in subsequent towns, by telling all the beggars that they were rich and mad, and that they loved to give money away. This revenge, I may say, was remarkably successful.

Barcelona, in those days, was one of the most sophisticated cities, and one of the toughest sea-ports, to be found in the world. The night-life, in particular, was fantastic. It was not until later, when I stayed there with some Spanish dancers, that I really learned to know this life, and to write about it in a book called *Tzigane*. There is in Barcelona a wide street near the port, called the Paralelo, and on either side of the Paralelo are situated cafés, music-halls, "dancings," night-clubs, and cinemas. Towards the end of the long street the entertainment provided becomes frankly obscene, and none of the *boîtes* is remarkable for any particular refinement. The favourite entertainment places, before the Civil War, were undoubtedly the music-halls, but these were music-halls of the Spanish breed, bearing little or no relation to their English counterpart.

You seldom see male performers in a Spanish music-hall, nor do you see comedy numbers, acrobats, or ballets. The artists are all soloists, and all girls. These vary from the serious artists, flamenco singers, and classical dancers, to what are known as the "frivolas," or frivolous ones, otherwise nude girls with little enough talent and often bad enough figures. The unfortunate "frivola" performs for a

mere pittance. She prances on to the stage, singing (with no voice at all) a verse and the chorus of some inane song, and if she has a good figure hats are thrown onto the stage to compliment her. If she has a bad figure, she is quite simply booed off the stage, and that is the end of her.

But she has other difficulties with which to contend. It is, or used to be, against the law for dancers in Barcelona to appear entirely nude, and the police were apt to raid and fine theatres in which the law was defied. Needless to say, it was defied in nearly every music-hall, where an ingenious system was devised to outwit the prohibition. As soon as the police approached the theatre, a doorman would signal inside, so that, unknown to the audience, a red light would flash in the footlights, warning the "frivola" to rush off the stage, grab a shawl, and return to finish her number looking modest enough for a convent.

You never pay for your seat in a Spanish music-hall. You buy a drink, when you are inside, and for one expensive coffee you can watch a show lasting several hours. After the show the audience stays on drinking, abetted by "hostesses," known as "tangistas," who are much insulted if they are in any way connected with the demi-monde, although for the life of me I have never been able to see very much difference.

But I was once at an artists' boarding-house in Barcelona where the clientele consisted exclusively of dancers, café singers, "frivolas," and "tangistas." To this house, which was kept by a wicked old woman named Mother Augusta, there came one day two young ladies from Madrid. They seemed demure enough, and were discreetly clad in black, but an awful moment occurred when they were asked by Mother Augusta where they were employed, for they were prostitutes, and did not attempt to deny it. They were sent packing within a quarter of an hour, and the whole boarding-house rocked with horror. In fact, it took the

"frivolas" and the "tangistas" some days to recover from the shock.

"Mama!" they gasped at intervals, alternately crossing themselves and fanning themselves at the thought of so narrow an escape from pollution.

There was, I remember, at this same boarding-house a little fifteen-year-old dancer named Soledad. Soledad's mother, aged about thirty, was immensely proud of her daughter, and this ambition took the curious form of insisting that the child should be as much of a scholar as she was a dancer.

She told me, with pride:

"Soledad studies mathematics—every day! Algebra and geometry! Imagine, *señorita*, at eleven o'clock she begins her studies of these sciences, and she works with her tutor until it is time for her to eat . . . then, in the afternoons she takes her dancing lesson . . . she's unique, isn't she? Confess that never before in your life have you known a Spanish dancer conversant with mathematics!"

Poor Soledad! She was a lovely little creature with the brown eyes of a fawn, and I knew then why it was that when she was not actually dancing she seemed so pale and listless. For Soledad never went to bed before five o'clock in the morning, and only a few hours later she was doomed to study algebra!

The mothers of the various artists were an important part of the boarding-house clientele. They accompanied their daughters to the theatre, where they waited in the wings with shawls all ready to throw over the naked girls when they had finished their numbers. One of them, I remember, insulted a famous painter who wanted to paint her "frivola" daughter in the nude. She thought that he was disgusting.

Some of the artists "alternated." That is to say, that after they finished performing they dressed themselves in their

best and went to drink with clients in the private boxes until five, six, or seven in the morning. They were, of course, paid for every bottle of wine opened. Some of them got drunk every night, but the more intelligent ones tipped the waiters to empty their glasses when the client was looking the other way. The waiters were adept at this performance, and made it seem like sleight of hand.

Most music-halls had their own troupe of flamenco musicians, who usually began work about four o'clock in the morning. Being gypsies, these artists kept very much to themselves, and seldom came near the theatrical lodging-houses. They crowded pell-mell in that ancient rookery of tumble-down houses situated near The Villa Rosa, and here they talked *Caló*, and drank aguardiente, quarrelled, loved one another, knifed one another, spat upon the floor, bore babies, made music, and generally lived as gypsies always have lived, and always will.

The performance of these Cuadros Flamencos is something that I will never forget. They have no stars; every artist is equal. They sit upon the stage in a semi-circle, guitarists, dancers, singers, and each one performs in turn, accompanied by the guitars, and by the rhythmical hand-clapping of the others. Their music is unique; I have never heard gypsy music that pleased me so well. Their singing can be divine and devilish almost at the same time; curiously enough in the Romani language there is only one word for both. Their dancing is perhaps the most subtly wicked in the world, and there is nothing more eerie than the sight of a *gitana* performing the *farruca*.

Her fingers beckon, so do her eyes; her lithe body twists like a snake; she is not so much double-jointed as jointless; she will shudder, as she moves to the music, and then her feet stamp faster, her curling wrists are even more supple, the snapping of her fingers crisper, and then, suddenly, the frenzy is over, and she stands for a moment motionless, but

the pose of her head is contemptuous, and her eyes glitter in a way that is not good to see.

She has danced, all this time, to the mutter of guitars, the beating of hands, the stamping of feet, and to the hoarse, guttural cries of encouragement that are all a part of flamenco music. Whether you like it or whether you hate it, you will never, never forget it; all other dancing will seem a little tame, in future, and perhaps you are content that this should be so, for the chances are that the *gitana* has made your blood run cold.

Some years later I spent four months in Seville with a Cuadro Flamenco, and although I learned to know them intimately, they were always, when they danced, mysterious to behold.

Meanwhile, in Barcelona, I made a resolution to return alone to Spain and the Spanish gypsies. Fond though I was of my family, I considered them to be of no practical assistance whatever in connection with the affairs of Egypt.

So I wandered about Barcelona peering into dark churches, looking at Gaudi's sugar-cake houses and at his lovely, half-finished cathedral, watching games of pelota, visiting the amusement park at Tibidabo, and occasionally smoothing the indignant pillows of those of my relations who were still suffering from measles.

We returned to London by way of Paris, leaving Pam to finish her education in the care of a French general so ancient that, according to Pam, he retained the liveliest recollections of receptions at the Tuileries.

Back in London, I was delighted by the success of my book, *Flamenco*, but once again I was filled with restlessness. The darkness and fog of London seemed to me unendurable. Whenever I tried to concentrate upon my work other images broke through to disturb my peace of mind. I was haunted by Spain. I was haunted by visions of tawny, barren plains naked to the sun, huddled white villages, trails of donkeys

in bright harness, the candle-lit dusk of ancient churches, jewels framing a Madonna's waxen face, the clatter of castanets behind a shuttered window, beggars, singing shoe-blacks, and the echo of flamenco music.

Soon I went away for some weeks on a theatrical tour; when I returned, I went off again with the Circus.

ON THE TOBER

THE fact that I myself first learned to appreciate the Circus in the atmosphere of a great modern show by no means satisfied me, and it was not until I made friends with the owners of a little circus up in Norfolk that I was really content. I became so much attached to this small show that I feel I must at some length touch upon the time I spent with it, for it was typical of the little circus that has existed in England for so many years, owned and controlled by one family, wandering in a vague, haphazard way all over the British Isles, playing one-night stands, off again in the morning before the ashes of its nomad fires are cold.

Tom Terriss's Circus consisted of one patched and shabby tent for the spectacle itself, another for the grandly named "stables and menagerie," a pair of aged tractors, some battered lorries, and a number of caravans. Its joy and pride was a young elephant named Lucy, but the circus also possessed six black liberty horses bought from an undertaker who had gone bankrupt. Quite apart from the encouraging singularity of such a disaster occurring to an undertaker, the contrast in the horses' lot never ceased to amuse me. One day, so to speak, they were drawing hearses, and on the next they were waltzing to public applause. They seemed unmoved by so much variety; they were old, and always looked dejected.

Tom Terriss also possessed two shaggy white mountains of horses for trick-riding, and four piebald Shetland ponies. The disdainful grey Barb standing next to them was not his

horse, but belonged to my enemy, the Prussian high-school rider. It was called Sultan, and always had the infuriating expression of one who, having come down in the world, thoroughly despised its present circumstances. The grooms, who were often the same as the clowns, or vice versa, called it "The Char of Persia."

The menagerie consisted of three puppy-like young lions, a cage of monkeys, and a three-legged cow named Daisy, but of course the elephant was the star turn.

Tom Terriss was a short, florid man with a fierce black moustache and extraordinary gifts as a weather prophet. I never knew him to be wrong.

"To-morrow," he would say, looking up at a cloudless sky, "it'll be fine till they're inside for the matinée. Then it'll come on to drizzle for an hour or so. It'll clear off then till it's time for the evening show, and then we'll catch it all right. Regular cloud-burst. But we'll have a fine night for the jump—wait and see."

Tom was a native of Yorkshire, but one could only tell this from his speech when he was agitated. He was born and bred in the Circus. His parents were wire-walkers; he was fond of boasting that he was born after the matinée and that his mother appeared the same night at the evening performance, but I am a little sceptical of so much resilience, even in a wire-walker.

Tom was an acrobat as soon as he could toddle, and for many years he toured England as apprentice to a Risley act. That is to say that his Uncle Willie, lying on his back, kicked Tom in the air and balanced him with his feet rather as though he were a rubber ball. Some years later, Tom, after having been in succession bareback rider, clown, and equestrian director in circuses all over the world, achieved two ambitions: he married, and he bought the small circus but recently acquired by his Uncle Willie of Risley fame.

By his first wife he had three children, Roy, Millie, and

Kitty. He then encountered Romance. He married a fortune-teller. It appears that he was at Blackpool on a "busman's" holiday when, to quote his own words:

"A silly sort of idea came over me. I thought I'd like me palm read. Don't ask me why—I never had it read before nor since. But that's how I met Ma."

Ma was a buxom lady with a high colour, snapping black eyes, and a predilection for mixing stout with port. She had a child of her own, Mabel, and she had very hard things to say about the profession from which she herself had so recently retired.

"Palmists!" she would snort. "Give me ten sharp girls for a week and you'll have ten palmists that nobody won't know aren't Gypsy Lees, the whole damned pack of them. Palmists, indeed!"

Ma presided efficiently over the box-office, always wearing a hat with a dashing black ostrich feather. She was sharp of tongue, but kind-hearted. When Ted, the elephant-keeper broke his ankle, she insisted that the injury was a sprain, and she went to enormous trouble to massage it for hours daily. The result was hospital for Ted, and he limped for the remainder of his days, but there is no doubt that Ma's intentions were of the best.

Tom's son, Roy, was stocky and ginger-headed. He had once fancied himself as a boxer, and he even ran away to join a booth, but Tom's indignation was so great that he was forced to return after a few months. It was impossible for Tom to conceive of any child of his in a profession that was not the Circus, and Roy's defection shocked him to the core of his being. Roy himself was thwarted, and given to brooding. He was convinced that he had the makings of a light-weight champion, and the walls of his wagon were plastered with boxers' photographs. He will be eternally grateful to me because I produced a signed picture of Carnera for his collection. Roy trained the young lions,

clowned, presented the elephant, Lucy, demonstrated a lariat, drove a tractor, and was an excellent blacksmith.

Millie and Kitty were red-haired, plump, and pretty. Millie was supposed to be engaged to Kurt, the German rider, but some doubt existed in Tom's mind as to whether or not Kurt was already married, and the engagement was not a popular one. Kitty had "an understanding" with Tadpole, the clown from Lancashire. Tadpole was an active little man with an indiarubber face and a stamp collection that was supposed to be of great value.

One day there was a frightful hullabaloo when it was discovered that Lucy, the elephant, had devoured what was, according to Tadpole, the major portion of this collection. I never discovered the truth of this story, nor did I ever learn why Tadpole had left his stamps within reach of Lucy's exploring trunk, but the ensuing quarrel threatened to rend the circus in twain, and when the clown was discovered trying to administer an emetic to Lucy, Kitty declared that the "understanding" between them was at an end. Everyone sulked for some days, and the affair was only concluded by compensation being paid by Tom to his future son-in-law.

Millie and Kitty contributed sex-appeal to the circus. As Eastern houris they "dressed" the elephant act; in flesh-coloured tights they walked the wire, balancing themselves with Japanese paper sunshades; in spangled costumes they demonstrated "balloons and banners," the "toe-to-pummel," the "baguette," and other mysteries of bareback riding, both of them perched precariously on a vast, shaggy horse, smiling, frisking, kissing their hands to the awestruck little boys on the benches below.

Mabel, Tom's child by his second marriage, was a weedy, flaxen brat much disliked by her stepbrother and stepsisters. Every morning Mabel studied bareback riding with the aid of a "mechanic," a contraption which often left her

suspended in the air rather like a rebellious minnow at the end of a fishing-rod.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Let me down, Roy! Let me *daown*!"

She confided in me, sniffing:

"Know what I want to do? I want to go into pictures, that's what!"

"You'd better not let your father hear you say that," said I, unsympathetically.

Fortunately, however, for Tom, Mabel's charms were scarcely of that imperious nature which makes men forget themselves, and I cannot think her destiny will ever rival that of Marlene Dietrich.

Tom Terriss's Circus wandered down the East Coast playing every night in a different town. During the last half of the show the first part was packed for travelling and the stable-tent was already on its way when the patrons were beginning to think of going home. Sometimes, when there was a long "jump," the circus people travelled all night, arriving at their destination in the cold East Anglian dawn, shivering, cramped, stiff with sleep.

Kurt was unpopular because he disliked doing what he called "rough work," and he always tried to shirk his share. He said that he was a great artist, a big star in Berlin and Vienna and Budapest, and he was damned if he could see why he should be treated like a *dummkopf* of a tent-man. Why, I asked myself, was Kurt travelling with Tom Terriss's humble family show? He was a fine horseman, and a competent trainer. The answer to my question remained for some time a mystery to me, but one day I discovered that Kurt drank.

Kurt, to use Tom's own words, "couldn't keep off the booze." Tom, who was nobody's fool, knew that when he engaged him, but he was impressed by Kurt's past glories, and he knew how to deal with him. So long as Kurt did not go off on what Tom called a "bat" more than three

times during a tenting season, he was satisfied. Roy could always, at a pinch, replace him.

So Kurt, with his square shaven head, his pale face, his stiff, erect figure, and his Barb, "The Char of Persia," became part and parcel of the Terriss Circus. Like the other artists, he lived in a caravan, and if he really murmured endearing words to Millie Terriss, no one overheard them. He was a taciturn man.

But at night, or rather at dawn, when work was over for a few brief hours, Kurt would lock himself in his caravan and take a whisky bottle from a cupboard in the wall. He would drink a bottle and a half of whisky at a time. He needed that to find oblivion.

Oblivion was necessary to Kurt because the past was a bitter memory; bitter, that is, compared to the present. I have no doubt that as he sat there in his caravan, snoring, his head on his arms, he dreamed of the successes that once, long ago, he had known; of crowded, brilliant Circus arenas rich in gilt and red plush; of sixteen white Lippizan stallions surging like foam-crested waves to the crack of his whip; of himself, a debonair horseman; of the *piaffer*, and the Spanish trot, and above all, of the sound of applause—not the half-hearted clapping of a few peasants, but the cheers of enthusiastic cavalry officers who knew how splendid was his horsemanship.

For Kurt, each morning must have been desolate.

Tom Terriss's Circus is no longer on the road, and the family, now, are scattered, but I meet some of them annually at the Circus Reunion, and we remain friends. I will always be grateful to them for showing me how great a little show can be.

THE BIG TOP

MY grief when my old circus friend, Fred Martin died, was profound. Had it not been for Fred, it might have taken me many years to discover the Circus for myself, but he made the way easy. During my visit to Spain, Bertram Mills, who had, at one time, owned an interest of the Great Carmo Circus, now possessed a touring show of his own, which was destined to be managed by his sons.

Meanwhile, the Carmo Circus, experimenting with the first heating system ever used in an English tent, remained open all the winter, and I spent much time with the artists between shows. When the Big Top is empty it is often used as a club-room by the Circus people, who sit there smoking and gossiping and talking shop. I heard some strange stories in those days, and I have not forgotten them.

There was Papa Könyot, the tent-master, who played, like Pan, on a pipe of reeds, and who remembered being sent with his sister—when they were respectively ten and eleven—half-way across snow-swept Hungary in charge of five valuable horses. Papa Könyot said to me once:

“There are some funny fellows in our business . . . take old Brandt, who owned what artists used to call ‘Satan’s Circus.’ Once Brandt was touring short-handed in North Africa when he picked up two men who seemed desperate for a job. Brandt never asked questions, so he took them along with him into Spain. When they reached the French frontier, the two men gave in their notice. This didn’t suit Brandt, so he sent for them to the office, and you would have thought butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth.

"‘I know,’ said he, ‘why you fellows want to leave me . . . you’re deserters, aren’t you, from the French Foreign Legion?’

"The two men couldn’t deny it, so they said nothing.

"‘Well,’ Brandt says, ‘you don’t think I’m likely to shop you? Why should I—I need hard workers like you two. . . . I’ll raise your wages if you stay on, and what’s more I’ll protect you from the French police . . . that’s fair enough, isn’t it?’

"The two men talked matters over and decided to stay on, for they had no other work in view, and so they went over the frontier into France.

"Now, Brandt had at this time a very dangerous mixed group of wild animals, and one night his trainer was badly mauled. He had no one to take this man’s place, and so he sent for the two deserters.

"‘Men,’ he said, ‘I’ve a little proposition for you. You know my trainer’s wounded? Well, someone’s got to work those cats to-morrow at the matinée. There’s all the morning for practice, and you can draw lots which of you it’s to be. . . .’

"Naturally, the two men burst out laughing, but they didn’t laugh long. Brandt said:

"‘If neither of you will do this, I’ll send for the police. You know what deserters from the Legion get? Eight years in the salt-mines . . . think it over. . . .’

"The men did not need to think much. They drew lots, and the one who lost went into the cage with a pack of raging lions and tigers. . . . In ten minutes’ time he was torn to pieces. Then Brandt said to the other, cool as a cucumber:

"‘Your turn, now. . . .’”

"What happened?" I asked, eagerly, for the old man seemed to have fallen into a reverie.

"What happened? Oh, I was forgetting . . . well, the

other fellow went into the cage looking as though he was a corpse already. But it's funny—some people irritate wild animals just by their presence, and others have a sort of soothing effect on them. The second legionary was one of the soothing kind. Nothing happened to him. You know him. He's X now, and you know yourself what a good trainer X is. You might call that a lucky day for X."

"Hasn't Brandt got a very beautiful wife?" I asked.

"His wife's worse than he is, which is saying quite a lot. Once she took a lover, and she got tired of him, but he kept on pestering her. The story goes that she had him poisoned by a cobra, and that, naturally, was the end of him. . . ."

"Do you believe that?"

"Who can say? Strange things happen in our business, just as in any other."

"That's true," said one of the clowns, "what about the Alligator Man?"

"What is that?"

"It's gospel truth," the clown asserted, "and it's a story everyone in the profession knows. . . ."

"About fifty years ago, the manager of a London suburban music hall engaged an alligator act for one week. The trainer was German, and the four alligators were big ones. There were the usual props—a great glass tank—steel boxes for the alligators to travel in. On the Thursday, that is two nights before the end of the engagement, the manager was down at the theatre as usual. He lived nearby, and he walked home that night expecting, as usual, to have supper with his wife. Much to his surprise, she was out, and the maid, who seemed equally surprised, said:

"'I don't see how you could have missed her. She went down to the theatre. She said supper was to be punctual because she was going to sit in front, and she would go round for you afterwards and bring you home early.'"

"Well, the manager was somewhat mystified, as you can well imagine. There were no telephones in those days, so after he'd finished his supper he decided to stroll down to the theatre and see what the fireman had to say. When he arrived, he found the fireman looking even more puzzled than he was himself, which is saying a lot.

" 'So you heard about the alligators, sir?' asked the fireman, scratching his head.

" 'Heard what about the alligators?'

" 'Well, they've disappeared.'

" 'What the hell do you mean?'

" 'It's the truth. I can't make it out. When I took on to-night I found the alligators gone. No, they've not escaped—their travelling-boxes are gone, and so is the tank. It looks as though the fellow had packed-up after his number, but he could scarcely do that without everyone knowing, could he?'

"The manager went home that night feeling the world was crazy. However, he decided his wife must have taken offence at something or other, and gone off to her parents, as she'd once done before, so he sent her a telegram and went to bed, although the chances are he didn't sleep too soundly.

"The next morning he found out that not only had his wife vanished, but also the German trainer, the four alligators, the steel boxes, and the glass tank. . . .

"Naturally, inquiries were made, and some funny things came to light . . . to start with, the wife had been sitting in front that night, all right. Several witnesses swore to that. She'd been in front, that is, for the first half of the programme. Nobody, however, had seen her after the interval.

"Odder than that was the fact that nobody had seen the trainer after his number. Nobody had seen him leave the theatre, although the stage door-keeper was reading his paper and said he mightn't have noticed.

"But all that's fairly easy, as you'll admit . . . the alligators are the real snag. The four alligators, their heavy steel boxes, and their glass tank! How could anyone smuggle them out of a theatre without the whole world knowing? Well, of course the police were put on to it, but they couldn't find a single clue. All that was known was that the trainer never came back to his 'letty,' to his lodgings, that night after the show. And it was never even established that the wife and the trainer so much as knew each other to speak to, although she'd been in front for every performance since his engagement, and usually she only saw the show once a week. . . .

"Anyway, none of them were ever seen again, and that's the story. It's a queer one, as you must admit, and what's more, as I said before, it's true!"

"Listen," I said, "the fireman was lying. He was obviously their accomplice. He must have helped them move the alligators and the tank."

"Two men and a woman couldn't have moved them," the clown objected.

"Then they must have had other accomplices?"

"All right. Let's suppose that they had. But where were they moved to? Did they get on a cab? Did they go to a hotel? Or did they get on a train, and then on a ship?"

"They might have——"

The clown shook his head.

"Not a hope. I told you the police were searching everywhere. Not only the police, but the newspapers. The whole world knew these people were missing. Well, it might just be possible for a man and a woman to hide somewhere, but where do you suppose they're going to hide when they're travelling four enormous alligators, four steel boxes, and a huge tank?"

"I give it up," said I, after a pause, "and I'm beginning to wish you'd never told me the story."

"You're a writer," argued the clown, unkindly, "can't you find a solution?"

I have tried to do so, but so far I have been unsuccessful.

The other day, I read the ten mysteries that Mr. James Agate would most like solved, and I immediately compared my own.

They are:

- (1) Who was Mr. W. H.?
- (2) Who was the Dark Lady of the Sonnets?
- (3) What was the Glamis Monster?
- (4) Did Mary Stuart assist in Darnley's murder?
- (5) What happened to the *Mary Celeste*?
- (6) Was Madeleine Smith innocent?
- (7) Who was Jack the Ripper?
- (8) Was the Dauphin smuggled out of the Temple?
- (9) Did Branwell Brontë help Emily write *Wuthering Heights*?
- (10) What happened to the Alligator Man, the woman, and the four alligators?

I am not sure that the great alligator question is not perhaps the most mysterious of these mysteries.

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THE GUV'NOR

THERE were some vivid personalities in the early tenting shows that Bertram Mills put on the road. The most remarkable was Bertram Mills himself, the "Guv'nor," who stepped straight from the pages of Dickens to immortalize his name with Astley's, and with Sanger's, and with Barnum's.

The Guv'nor was a short, stocky man with a bald head, a ruddy, pugnacious face, a grey moustache, and twinkling, shrewd blue eyes. His eyes were as blue as the cornflower he invariably wore in his button-hole. He would have looked undressed without that cornflower. I suppose the Guv'nor was the only carriage-maker in the world who ever thought of entering the circus business, and he is undoubtedly the only amateur who has in this profession succeeded by sheer talent in establishing himself at the head of it. Had he been brought up in the Circus, we would have thought that he had a flair amounting to genius, and that would have been the end of the matter.

But does anyone outside the profession realize with what he had to contend?

When he first put on a circus he was ignorant of matters so elementary that his humblest employee, bred on the "tober," would probably have laughed in his face had Mills been a softer man. What did he know, for instance, of the tent, the Big Top, without which no road-show can exist? To Mills, in the beginning, the tent was simply a white canvas erection beneath which patrons of his show collected. At first he knew nothing—less than nothing—of

those heroic difficulties that must be overcome by men who build-up and pull-down this canvas monster in rain and gales and thunderstorms and snow. These men, whose technical knowledge equals that of those who sailed the windjammers in the old days, must, in the beginning, have bewildered him considerably, for they are a tough, conservative community, very resentful of amateurs.

He was told, I remember, that Englishmen could never be trained to build a tent as big as his, a tent that holds more than three thousand people.

"The only people you'll ever get," he was told, "are Czechs. Every big French and German show has Czech tent-men. You'll have to have them, too."

"Not I," said the Guv'nor.

Nor did he. He engaged Englishmen, and I have never seen men work better than these tent-men of the Bertram Mills Circus.

But this is only one small instance of the many things he had to learn.

He possessed, it is true, one great asset in this new profession; his knowledge of horseflesh was profound; he was the equal of any gypsy horse-wizard. Perhaps that is why the Bertram Mills' liberty horses are the finest that have ever been seen in the ring. At the same time, this knowledge was scarcely destined to help him detect the merits of acrobats, clowns, tigers, and elephants, yet in the end no one knew more of these matters than he.

Genius is a word all too lightly used, but there is no doubt that the Guv'nor had genius. He thought that his first Olympia Circus would be an easy matter, since he had taken the precaution of booking John Ringling's American show, but when, a short time before Olympia, the negotiations fell through, and he was left without a circus, he was forced to book his own. I really do not think that, apart from horses, he knew the first thing about the circus, but he

returned from the Continent in triumph, heading a superb show. Perhaps it was then, for the first time, that he realized of what he was capable. The business began to fascinate him. With a dogged determination he set himself to learn those affairs of the "tober" that little Pat Baker had known as soon as he could walk and talk.

It is common knowledge that he succeeded, but exactly what he contributed to Circus history is not yet generally known.

He was the first person to cut numbers to their bare essentials.

That is to say that he would book an act accustomed to work for twenty minutes and cut it down to five. Nothing dragged, and nothing was allowed to become boring, but it may well be imagined with what fury certain artists greeted this innovation. The Guv'nor was indifferent. He pared every number down to its ultimate moment of thrill, suspense, grace, or comedy. The padding did not interest him. I believe I am right in saying that he was the first producer—using the word in its theatrical sense—that the Circus has known. If I may use the expression, I would like to point out that he brought "theatre" to the Circus, with the results that we have seen. Nowadays, all over the world, these methods are imitated, but they were considered revolutionary when he first employed them.

I have heard many artists complain:

"Working at Olympia isn't working at all. You're no sooner in the ring than you're out!"

At the same time I observe that they are ready enough to print the words: "Straight from Olympia, London," in all their professional advertisements. Olympia has become the high-note, the *cachet*, of an artist's success.

While the Guv'nor was liked and respected by those who worked for him, he was intensely reserved with the artists, and he once told me that this formality, of which he himself

was conscious, came of his own obsession that he was an amateur amongst professionals.

I thought this attitude unreasonable. One day, when I had been talking to him in his caravan, I told him that I must go, because I had an appointment.

"Who with?"

"With X. He's giving a cocktail-party in his wagon."

"I'll walk across with you," said the Guv'nor.

At the door he paused, and said:

"Well, I'll see you later."

I said boldly:

"Why don't you come in for a minute? You know how pleased they'd be?"

"They don't want me," said the Guv'nor, shaking his head.

However, I persuaded him, and at last he came inside the caravan. At first the artists were considerably awed, but in five minutes' time the Guv'nor's charm and friendliness had gained him yet another conquest, and with the natural simplicity of all great men, he was soon entirely at his ease, and so were they.

He was a loyal and lion-hearted friend, and he is so recently dead that it is not easy to write about him. I only know that the news of his death made me desolate. He was so radiantly happy in his family life that he had, amongst a vast host of acquaintances, very few close friends, but I flatter myself that I was one of them. In many ways his generous gaiety reminded me of my father, and certainly these two men possessed one kink in common—they could neither of them resist buying a horse.

I remember motoring all over Scotland with the Guv'nor when he was following his own show. The fact that I was in bed in London with a bad feverish cold meant nothing to him, when once he had decided to travel North.

I said:

"I think I'm dying! I never felt so ill in all my life."

His voice snapped across the telephone.

"Nonsense! You can go to bed on the train, and Scotch air will do you all the good in the world!"

"I really can't move——"

"I'll expect you at the station to-morrow," retorted the Guv'nor, hanging up the receiver.

The odd thing is that this trip did not kill me, although I really think I was slightly light-headed for the first three days. I remember that we always motored between the matinée and the evening show, and we motored with one objective—to look for horses. The horses might be, and usually were, half a mile away, but this did not deter the Guv'nor.

He would stop the car, and say:

"Do you see that horse over there?"

I would reply, sneezing and coughing:

"I see something in the distance, but it's so far away it might be an elephant."

"Nonsense! It's a nice-looking horse. A very nice-looking horse."

"Is it really?"

"Yes. I think it might be worth while going to inquire about that horse, but—if I might happen to buy it, don't you dare tell the boys!"

The "boys" were his sons, Cyril and Bernard, who are now the very competent owners of the Bertram Mills Circus. The Guv'nor, when he bought horses, was like a naughty child, and he secreted his purchases down at the Ascot winter quarters, where he optimistically imagined that they would escape notice. They were, of course, invariably discovered.

He had less idea of time than anyone I ever met. He readily undertook a dozen engagements a day, and as he was late for most of these, he was usually in process of being

tracked all over England by platoons of harassed secretaries.

Sometimes he disappeared further afield.

When Miss Moore, his personal secretary, wanted to remind him that he was supposed to be opening the annual Nottingham Fair, he was at length run to earth in a tiny German tenting show. He chartered a private aeroplane, arriving punctually in Nottingham.

He once, in his office, said to the late Arthur Sowler:

"It's just on two—we'll have lunch. I've got to sign a few letters, but I won't be more than five minutes. Will you go down and wait for me in the car?"

Arthur Sowler waited until six o'clock that evening for his lunch.

Every night the Guv'nor motored home to Buckinghamshire, no matter how late he was, for his home, his wife, and his family meant more than anything to this very typical Englishman.

He said to me once:

"It was a nasty moment for me when I had to go home and break to my wife that I'd agreed to produce a circus at Olympia. You see, it wasn't as though she'd been prepared for the news. . . ."

"What did she say?"

"She was a bit upset at first. She said, 'Oh, Bertram, how *could* you take such a gamble, just as we're beginning to do well enough to give the boys a good education. . . .' but then she thought for a bit, and then she said, 'All the same, if you've got to do it, you've got to make a success of it, and I'll give you every scrap of help I can. . . .' Do you know," the Guv'nor concluded simply, "I really don't know what I'd do without her."

TOGARE AND THE LIONS

THE Bertram Mills Circus is like a tent-town, a canvas city where every person seems to work and play harder than in other towns where I have lived. This applies to owners, managers, artists, tent-men, musicians, blacksmiths, ring-attendants, grooms, and firemen. It applies no less strongly to their wives. Circus wives do their house-keeping in caravans that are often no larger than the kitchen of a semi-detached villa. In these wagons they bear children, bring them up, cook enormous meals at any hour of the night or day, dust, sweep, darn, make and take care of ring costumes, and frequently themselves perform twice a day in the circus.

Their cooking is justly renowned. They have travelled so much that the majority of them can produce at short notice the national meals of half Europe.

They say:

"What would you like—an Italian dinner? A Hungarian goulash? *Arroz à la Valenciana*? Or something Swedish?"

Coco, the Russian clown, has six or seven children. He works a comedy entrance, during the course of which half a dozen eggs are smashed over his head. At least once a day you will hear the voice of Mrs. Coco, addressing one or another of her brood:

"Sasha! Michel! Which of you is going to run over to the store and get those eggs for Papa's entrée?"

Bombayo, the Indian wire-walker who recently died, was married to a pretty Italian girl, and they had a child, Charlie, who must now be about five. When I knew him he was a

beautiful miniature bronze aged three, but already he could stand on his father's hand; the Baker Boys would put him astride their big horses, and when he was taken down, he cried with rage. Coco's eldest daughter is a skilful clown, and the ringmaster's son, young Frank Foster, told me the other day that he intended to become a rider. The Chinese troupe adopted a half-caste baby named Margot, and when I last saw Margot, she was gravely studying somersaults.

The Circus is in the blood of these children, and no children in the world have a more rapturous existence.

Manzano, the Spanish high-school rider, was one of the most colourful artists I ever met. Swarthy, graceful, and muscular, he looks exactly like a *matador*; he is a magnificent horseman, and a finished artist. He is also a considerable personality. When he was working in Red Spain, the artists were ordered to make the Communist salute whenever they took a call. Manzano declared that he would rather die.

"What happened, Arturo?" I asked.

I was visiting the Manzanos at the Favorosi-Nagy Circus in Budapest, and we were eating supper after the show.

"I didn't make the salute," Arturo retorted, "when I jumped off the horse I made a bullfighter's 'pass' instead of bowing, and I spun my big Andalusian hat on my right hand . . . when we were leaving Spain I was hauled before a tribunal in Barcelona and I thought my last moment had come——"

"Three hours he was there," interrupted his wife, Maria, "and during that three hours my hair turned grey, as you see for yourself."

Maria Manzano is a remarkable woman. Arturo trained bulls, and these animals were very savage; when he was ill, she went into the ring on foot, and put the bulls through their number. She is passionately religious, but sometimes inclined to brood; once she put a spell upon a man who, she

declared, had cursed her husband; in three weeks' time he was dead.

One day, in London, a gypsy girl came round to see me. She was a dancer from Seville; half Armenian gypsy, half Spanish. Her name was Aurora. She wanted to dance in London, and I was able to get her a contract in what she called "the West End." She was the Leonora of Borrow's story, a charming little animal who thought the "Busnés"—the non-gypsies—too stupid to take seriously.

"What do English people know about Spanish dancing? So long as I dance 'Carmen,' and throw carnations at old gentlemen, they're perfectly satisfied. . . . They don't appreciate flamenco . . . they are silly."

One night I took Aurora to a supper-party at the Café Royal. At the next table I saw Professor Starkie, who was dining with his publisher, Mr. Murray. I introduced Aurora to the gypsy professor, and we all went on to John Murray's publishing-house. Here Aurora danced the *farruca* while Starkie played the fiddle. This party took place in the very room where "Don Jorge" signed his first contract with the original John Murray, and I think the ghost of Borrow must have haunted our party.

Soon afterwards I introduced Aurora to the Circus, where she was an instantaneous success. Freddie—a Circus fan—gave a party for her, Togare, and the Manzanos, and this party, the entertainment of which included knife-throwing and wrestling, lasted for about eight hours.

Togare's story is a strange one.

He is, I suppose, the best showman of tigers in the world to-day. In the beginning he worked lions, and a particularly savage lion, "Paris," so pined when he left it that it never worked again. The love of Paris for Togare has already become Circus history.

Togare was born in peasant Serbia, of a Turkish mother. As a child, he was sent to herd goats, and whenever he

lost a goat, which was often, he was beaten. He was still a little boy when his father, a blacksmith, moved to Austria, and became an Austrian citizen.

It was decided that the young Togare, aged thirteen, should be apprenticed to a butcher. A calf was killed in front of him, and the butcher rubbed Togare's face in the blood.

"Now you'll know!" the butcher said.

Togare knew enough to run away.

He roamed Austria until the army seized him. He was a big boy for his age, and he had no papers. He was made to fight when he was about fourteen. He remained in the army until he was seventeen. Then he went away with a troop of gypsies, and after some months of smuggling, he joined a boxing-booth. His stories of this experience were illuminating.

At first he was made to play the "dupe"; to sit, as a stupid peasant, in the audience, and finally to accept the challenge of one of the fighters, after which he was, of course, knocked out. At last he graduated, and became a boxer. He was so young that he was then a light heavy-weight.

He fought a dozen times a day. He had no time to develop as a boxer. His comrades often became blind and punch-drunk—ephemeral as only booth-fighters can be. Sometimes, when they knew that the young Georges Togare must meet men ten years older than himself, they weighted his gloves, and then, when this trick was discovered, there would be a rough-house, and people would call "Hey Rube!" and then the showground and the "flatties" would meet in a bloody, savage fight. Those were rough days, and Togare could see no future for himself in the booths, although he loved boxing.

One day, when he was sitting gloomily on the steps of his wagon, peeling potatoes in the winter sunshine, a woman came across to speak to him. She was a handsome woman

of forty-odd, and the young boy was deeply impressed by her. She was Lola Pietro, Mexican trainer of fifteen Polar bears.

She said :

"My cage-boy's left me. Would you like the job?"

"I'll try," he said.

Six months later they were married, and by this time Togare was no longer a cage-boy, but a pupil.

He had a gift for charming wild animals. Lola discovered him and trained him. She taught him all she knew, and was almost afraid of his swift progress.

"He was always at home, in the Big Cage," she told me, "his foot-work was extraordinary, from the first; he had no fear. But, of course, that meant nothing; you can never tell how a young trainer will shape until he's been mauled for the first time. . . ."

THE TIGERS ESCAPE

TOGARE went to Russia with lions, and exchanged them—made a “chop”—as the gypsies say, for a mixed group that no one else would work.

The mixed group included lions, tigers, bears, and panthers. One night he was horribly mauled. His thigh was clawed, his face was slashed, and two teeth were knocked out. He was some weeks in hospital, and then he returned to the Big Cage. His nerves were not affected, and it was known then that he was destined to become a great trainer.

One night, when he was working in Moscow, a stranger asked to see him. He was so persistent that at last Togare admitted him to his dressing-room.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

“Only to give you this,” said the stranger.

He thrust into Togare’s hand a tiny, enamel cross, the Cross of St. George, most highly prized decoration of the Russian Army.

“I once won this for bravery. After seeing you to-night, I would rather it was yours. . . . Good night, trainer of wild animals!”

Togare was soon expelled from Russia. So many women came to throw him bouquets into the ring that his work was described as “anti-Communistic,” and his permit was confiscated.

He came back to Germany, where Fred Martin engaged him for the great Carmo Circus, and some time afterwards, when he was working tigers, he joined the Bertram Mills Circus.

One night I went down to Plymouth, to spend a few weeks in Devonshire with the Circus. I arrived late for the *matinée*, and after tea I wandered into the Big Top, to see the last numbers. The last number of all was Togare's act.

Togare was then working an illusion invented by himself.

He worked in Oriental costume, with a huge idol "back-stage," so to speak. After his own entrance, this idol belched forth smoke and flames, while the tigers sprang, one at a time, through its huge, grinning mouth. The illusion was diabolically effective; but it possessed one drawback—the trainer stood facing the idol, and could not, therefore, see what was happening behind his back.

On this particular occasion, a groom, or cage-man, had been appallingly careless. He had left the door of the Big Cage open. To my horror, I saw three huge tigers pad through this door into freedom, while Togare, still coaxing the others into the ring, had no idea what was happening.

I suppose at least three thousand people were sitting happily in the tent. They were most certainly not happy for very long. The tigers were scared, at being loose, and they soon separated; one darted out of the tent, while the others stood uncertain, glancing about them with yellow, rolling eyes. Then someone screamed, and the two tigers sprang. As they sprang, everyone screamed, and by this time the tigers were badly frightened. One leaped clear over a box, and vanished after scratching a woman's head.

The other was not so fortunate. He, too, tried to jump, but he slipped; snarling, he tried to steady himself, but he was too late; a fainting woman lay in his way; he growled, clawing violently at her leg, and then he, too, fled like striped lightning for the opening in the tent.

The circus people, as is their custom in such fearful emergencies, behaved with ice-cold courage. While the two injured women were bundled into ambulances, the entire staff, headed by Togare and Frank Foster, the ringmaster,



TOGARE

went calmly forth to capture three ferocious man-eating tigers.

Outside, a curious thing had happened.

A long queue of people were waiting patiently for the evening performance, and one of the tigers padded quietly along by the side of this queue. He was nervous, his whole routine having been disturbed; his hackles rose, and he was not quite sure what he was doing. The people, on the other hand, were very sure. This was Bertram Mills' Circus, and whatever Bertram Mills did was right. This was obviously a tame tiger, produced for their own especial benefit. He was there, this tiger, to amuse them while they waited.

"Isn't he sweet?"

"Just like a cat, isn't he?"

They leaned benevolently over the railing, and a number of them were kind enough to scratch Bramah's back. Bramah, the killer—a tiger so fierce that he had to be shuttered off to eat alone, lest he might attack his own brothers!

The tigers were finally netted, and the injured people eventually recovered, but I do not think anyone who saw Bramah walking by the queue will ever forget that ghastly moment. . . . Togare himself suffered from insomnia for more than a fortnight.

Someone to whom I told this story said:

"The tigers must have been doped."

To anyone who knows anything about the Circus, the thought of animals being doped is even more grotesque than the thought of them being brutally treated. No animal can work unless it is healthy. No animal can be healthy if it has been unkindly used. I have never, in my long experience of the Circus, seen a badly treated animal, and I have lived with circuses all over Europe. I have lived with these shows as a member of the troupe. I have gone in and out of the

Big Top as I wished and I have always watched practice with the keenest interest. If I ever see any case of cruelty to animals I shall be the first to report it, but so far I have never seen such a case.

Once, when I was in Scotland with Bertram Mills, I went over to lunch at some Highland castle or other, where an old beldame, knowing from whence I came, fixed me with a glittering eye.

She said:

"Lady Eleanor, if I had to see a child or a dog run over by a motor-car, I would prefer to see the child killed. That's the way I happen to feel. . . ."

I could not resist it.

I said:

"Lady M——, sometimes the Spanish are right to call the English uncivilized!"

"Why?"

"Because the Spanish don't need to have a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The idea of us having to have such a thing revolts them!"

"But the Spanish love the bull-fight!"

"Didn't you go out with the guns yesterday?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing much, I suppose," said I, "but I can't see so much difference."

"And yet you come from a circus?"

"Yes," I said, "I come from a circus, but I never yet saw any cruelty there."

I thought, as I spoke, of Togare coaxing his tiger cubs, of Gindl petting his baby elephants, of Manzano with his beloved horse, Brillante, and Mczkovski working patiently with his colts. Looking at this old dame, I saw Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy at its most malevolent.

I said:

"I'd willingly be an animal in this country, but I'd rather

never be born at all than be a slum-child here—the animals have a much better break!”

“Are you by any chance a Socialist?” inquired the old beldame.

“Certainly not,” I retorted.

By this time the old woman was glaring most furiously at me, and I perceived that I was scarcely a social success. I glared back at her, and wished most heartily that I had never accepted the invitation. Turning to my neighbour, I tried to make some futile conversation or other. But this time she would not leave me alone.

“You have no Scottish blood, I suppose?” said she.

By this time I was in a rage and determined to tell the truth.

“My illegitimate great-grandmother was Scottish,” said I, “she was Lord Montgomery of Eglinton’s daughter!”

The old hag leaned over the table.

“Then what,” she inquired, “do you happen to think of the massacre of Glencoe?”

By this time I did not care what happened to me so long as I could soon find some peace in the circus. I thought that if I was thrown out of this appalling house, I might find peace more easily. Nor was I acquainted with Scottish politics.

I said defiantly:

“Glencoe was a terrible business, wasn’t it? All those Campbells murdering all those Macs——”

At this point, to my immense astonishment, the old woman leaned over the table and squeezed my hand emotionally.

She said:

“You’re a fine girl! No matter if you’re illegitimate!”

“I’m not illegitimate!” I protested indignantly.

“No matter! You’re on our side—on our side over Glencoe! I’ll even go to your abominable circus after what you’ve just said!”

To my astonishment, she kept her word. I escorted her to a matinée, after which I took her to see the horses, the tigers, the elephants, and the zebras.

She said :

"I must say, they look happy enough . . . but you can't tell!"

"*I* can tell," said I, "I'm here all the time."

"You!"

And she turned to her friends outside the tent.

"This girl is nearly all Sassenach, but I will say she hates the Campbells as much as we do!"

I gave it up.

You can't argue with a Scot.

CIRCUS RIDER

ONE night, soon after this, when the Bertram Mills Circus was up in Glasgow, I went to a party given by Alberti, the Man on the Swaying Pole. All the Circus people were present, including Arthur Sowler, to whom I was imprudent enough to say:

"When are you going to let me ride in the ring, Arthur? You've promised me often enough."

"We'll see," he replied, and neither of us gave the matter another thought.

The next day I had some shopping to do in town, and the matinée was half over when I returned to the circus. To my astonishment, about four people suddenly rushed forward to greet me, waving their arms excitedly.

"Hurry! Hurry!"

"What do you mean—hurry?"

"Joey's sick. She can't ride in the Carrousel. You're taking her place—you said you would—and you've got less than fifteen minutes!"

I said firmly:

"Oh, no, I'm not! I'm not taking anyone's place without one single practice! Don't be silly! How could I?"

"But you said you would—last night at Alberti's party!"

By this time I was surrounded by about a dozen shouting, determined persons, and I cursed myself furiously. What had possessed me, publicly to assert that I wished to ride in the ring? Not for the first time I hated my own impetuous tongue. Meanwhile I knew that I should have to act

quickly; already eager hands were dragging me in the direction of the dressing-wagon.

"Listen," I said, with a false, ghastly smile, "I'd *love* to ride in Joey's place to-morrow, if she's still sick—which I hope with all my heart she won't be—because you see, don't you, that then I could practise in the morning? As it is, much as I should enjoy it, I'm afraid I shall have to refuse . . . you see, I haven't the slightest idea what a rider in the Carrousel has to do . . . I only wish I had!"

Frank Foster, the ringmaster, popped-up like a jack-in-the-box.

"You've got about twelve minutes. Mczkovski says he'll tell you what to do in the stable-tent, as you get on."

"That's very kind of him. Very kind indeed. I shan't forget such kindness. But I'm afraid——"

"Oh, come *on!*" somebody urged, "do you want to hold up the show?"

No, I did not want to hold up the show. The idea of doing such a thing terrified me even more than the idea of riding without one single practice in an extremely complicated act. In fact, I had never been faced by two more hideous alternatives. In silence, I yielded. I donned flesh-coloured tights and a spangled tunic. A plumed cap was set upon my head, and make-up was slapped upon my pallid cheeks.

"Hurry up! Hurry up!" shouted someone outside the wagon.

"Are you ready?" asked Grace Foster.

I nodded.

My mouth was dry, and my knees showed a horrid inclination to cleave together. Furthermore, they were shaking. In a deathly silence, I walked towards the stable-tent. One or two people called out to wish me luck, but my ears are sharp, and I could not help overhearing one groom say to another:

"They must be crazy! How can she ever make it?"

Was he telling me? I tried to cheer myself up by reflecting:

"This is at least better than going in with the tigers. . . ." But I did not really think so.

In the stable-tent the horses were waiting, and so was Mczrkovski. He appeared to me to be waiting most impatiently.

"Mczrkovski," said I, in a hoarse voice, "what do I have to do?"

"Just follow me—and hurry up!"

Those were my only instructions.

I got on my horse, a large white stallion.

The moment I had done so, I felt better, for he was a great horse, and I ceased to tremble. At the same time the buzz and murmur of an audience of three thousand people seated in the Big Top did nothing to soothe my nerves. A whistle blew, the curtains parted, and at full gallop we entered the ring.

A Carrousel, or Merry-go-Round act, consists of one central figure, in this case Mczrkovski, whose horse mounts a tower in the centre of the ring, and who, standing himself upon his saddle, directs from this eminence the other members of the group. These consist of four other riders, who, after galloping round the ring, jump their horses upon revolving pedestals. Then, at a signal, fifty liberty horses and ponies are sent into the ring, where they, too, revolve in different directions, beneath rays of coloured lights, thus giving the illusion of a Carrousel.

The effect to the audience is one of beauty; to the participants, one of extreme giddiness. Nor would it be pleasant to be thrown beneath a hundred trampling hooves, as might easily happen in this act.

These thoughts naturally occurred to me soon after I had jumped my horse upon the pedestal and we were all revolv-

ing dizzily together; in a moment, however, I felt calmer, and I was furthermore conscious of a profound sensation of gratitude towards the admirable white stallion upon whose back I was perched. I was glad, too, that I had often practised trick-riding in various circus rings, glad, that once I had won the prize of a box of chocolates for accepting a challenge to ride a cowboy's pony in Cologne circus. I even dared to snatch a glance at the audience—that resembled a vast black mass spotted with white.

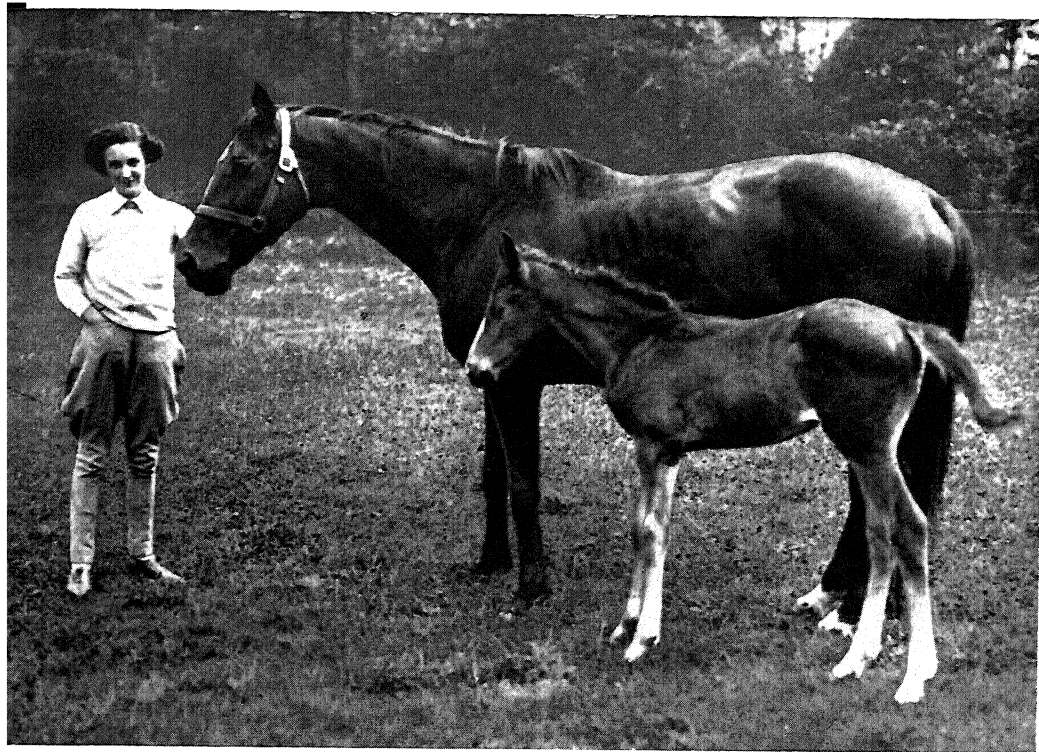
My nerves, in fact, vanished, and I thoroughly enjoyed the last mad dash round the ring. When I arrived back in the stable-tent I was warmly applauded; Coco, the clown, took my picture, and the Baker Boys' father offered to give me free tuition in bareback-riding. For my part I was glad enough to give my horse as much sugar as he wanted—I felt that he deserved encouragement more than I did.

Soon I enjoyed taking the sick girl's place; in a circus you get used to anything.

About this time, Frank Foster, the ringmaster, began to write his reminiscences. This seemed to be only a fair exchange, after my own début in the ring; I suggested that he should call his book *The Memoirs of a Mountebank*, and he agreed. Somehow I do not think my acrobatics are likely to be quite so successful as Frank's book.

It was while we were in Scotland that two interesting visitors arrived at the circus. They were R. B. Cunninghame Graham and his friend Tschiffely, hero of the famous two-year ride from Buenos Aires to New York, a ride which took him and his two ponies through jungles and swamps, across plains and over mountains, a ride which was to prove conclusively that the South American Criollo pony has no equal in endurance.

R. B. Cunninghame Graham was the most handsome old gentleman I have ever seen. He resembled some exquisite



WITH "RED WINE" AND FOAL

caballero who has stepped straight into this world from another and more gracious century. His thick hair and pointed beard were like silvery snow, his features were delicately modelled, his eyes blazed with vitality, and his slim figure was as erect as any youth's.

When *Red Wagon* first appeared "Don Roberto" warmed my heart by writing me an enthusiastic letter in Romani—the gypsy language being another of his odd accomplishments—but I had never before met him, although I had frequently seen him in the Row, when I was riding, and I had always wished to talk to him.

Why he is not better known as a writer will for ever remain a mystery to me, for his descriptive powers are astonishing, and the simplicity of his prose style, as demonstrated in an essay called "Long Wolf," is surely remarkable. As for *Reincarnation*, his sketch of a flamenco dancer, it is the most vivid thing of its kind that I have ever read.

Perhaps Tschiffely spoke the truth when in reply to this question, he answered grimly:

"Don Roberto wrote too well."

I suppose Cunninghame Graham was the last of the Romantics. He wandered for years in South America, and he lived with redskins and *péons* and other colourful characters that scarcely exist nowadays save on the screen, in cowboy dramas. He broke and rode and loved horses, and there was never a horse that he could not ride. He was Buffalo Bill's comrade, and he was as familiar with his own Scottish moors as he was with the ranches of the Argentine, with the African desert, and with the plains of Andalusia. I think he hated cities as much as he hated motor-cars. I believe, too, that he grudged every moment spent out of the saddle.

I had supper with the Guv'nor, Don Roberto, and Tschiffely, and once again I came to the conclusion that

men who love and know horses are possessed of a warm-hearted charm that must of a certainty be bred in stables, for I have never found the same sort of attractiveness anywhere near a garage or an aerodrome.

PART III

LATE NIGHT FINAL

I RETURNED to London, where I began to write another book.

I followed my usual plan of working in the afternoons, breaking off at six o'clock, and working again for several hours after dinner. This arrangement left my mornings free, and as I have never been able to subscribe to the theory that a woman novelist should go about looking like a sack of old potatoes, it gave me plenty of time to visit dressmakers and hairdressers while I was working. I usually allow myself six months in which to write a book, and I have only once in my life sat down to write without carrying in my head a carefully worked-out plan of the book in question. On that occasion the novel in question was scrapped before I had finished the second chapter.

I have myself always held the view that writing a novel is so many months' damnably hard work, although I have frequently had to listen to persons—themselves eminent in different professions—who have sought to tell me otherwise. Every writer knows the type of bore who asks, rather patronizingly:

"Doing any work?"

"Yes. I've half-finished a book."

"What's it called?"

"It hasn't got a title yet."

"How extraordinary! I should have thought you'd have made up the name before you ever started . . . well, as I always say, it must be grand work—just sitting down wherever you are, scribbling whatever comes into your

head, and getting paid for it! Some people have all the luck!"

No matter how deprecatingly you may murmur, this bore always has another shot in his locker, and it is:

"What was that thing of yours called—your first book, wasn't it?"

"*Red Wagon.*"

"Oh, yes, of course, how silly of me! Well, I was only thinking the other day how good that was—far and away the best thing you've ever done! Of course, I haven't read your last one."

Writing is lonely work. For months you are shut away in a world of your own, with people you yourself have created, and no one, until your book is finished, can tell you whether you have failed, or whether you have succeeded. For that reason, a playwright's life is perhaps more pleasant, for he, at least, has the bustle and camaraderie of rehearsal, the authority of his producer, the opinion, for what it is worth, of members of his company. He is not working, so to speak, in the darkness. And yet I am not altogether sure; if the playwright succeeds, his triumph is not his alone, but must be shared by many other people—those people who have, so skilfully, put flesh upon his skeleton. The novelist, on the other hand, if he is successful, need bow to no one; his triumph is his alone; he can savour it with absolute egotism. And failure is just as bad, whether or not you have to share it. There are, after all, compensations in being a novelist.

The pleasures of writing a novel naturally vary considerably. There are days when everything goes so well that it is torture to tear yourself away from your desk. Never again, perhaps, will your brain and your pen work with such admirable cohesion, never again, surely, will your characters behave with so much docility. . . .

As for the black days, I suppose every writer has to endure them, but that knowledge does not make them any

easier. Days of fidgeting, and twiddling a pen, and smoking too many cigarettes, and staring impatiently out of the window. Days when you are lucky if you write six words, four of which must be erased. Days of frantic striving to lash a tired brain into some sort of action, and ignoble failure to succeed in doing so. Days that must inevitably end in an irritable, nervous dissatisfaction that makes you, later in the evening, a curse to the unfortunate friends who have asked you to dine.

I have often experienced these moods of almost suicidal depression, and sometimes, in an effort to escape, have jumped upon the first bus I saw, only to be wafted to the even more gloomy associations of Hilldrop Crescent, or fried-fish shops, or deserted coffee-stalls, and—on one occasion—a Salvation Army meeting, where various persons persisted in asking me whether or not I was saved. The smell of wet mackintosh was in my nostrils, everyone was singing out of tune, and I had lost my latch-key.

I fled, and bumping homewards on the bus, fell into conversation with a pimpled American youth who informed me that he was one of Sister Aimée McPherson's disciples. This seemed to me the last straw, for I retained vivid memories of having been sent as a journalist to interview "Sister Aimée" at the Hotel Cecil, and having not only failed to obtain the interview, but having narrowly escaped eviction at the hands of the hotel "chucker-out." I said as much, warmly.

"Sister is above that sort of thing," the American declared.

"Oh, is she indeed? Let me tell you that I waited in vain—with toothache—for two hours outside her door after she'd consented to give me an interview."

I remembered, then, that Frank Pakenham, for reasons best known to himself, had been my companion on this particular occasion. Frank, who had no official status,

merely wished to argue with "Sister"; after waiting vainly for two hours, we repaired to the bar, where we each drank a strong cocktail, returning, refreshed, to batter once more upon the evangelist's door. Once more this door was opened a few inches by a horrid-looking little man with an acrobatic Adam's apple.

"Didn't I tell you both to get out?" he yelled. "You know perfectly well Sister's sleeping!"

At this moment a waiter tactlessly emerged from the suite trundling before him a depleted but still luxurious suppertable laid for two, and Frank cunningly inserted his foot inside the door.

"Listen," he said, pulling out his watch, "I've told you before that I'm catching a train to Oxford in twenty minutes' time, and I particularly wish Sister Aimée to convert me before I leave. Now, I ask you, in all reason, how much time does that allow us for a matter which you, my dear sir, must surely be the first to agree is not one that can, in decency, be hurried?"

It was at this point, that threatened by the chucker-out, we were forced to leave rather more quickly than we had anticipated—I without my interview.

"That's all very well," argued the American, after I had described this experience, "few people in England understood Sister's essential sweetness and simplicity of outlook. Do you realize that last Christmas, in public, at her Temple, Sister had her mother handed to her in a parcel from the Christmas tree?"

"She had what?"

"I'm telling you. It appears that she and her mother had words, and unfortunately the newspapers got hold of the story. Well, Sister was determined not to let a nasty tale like that get the rounds, especially at Christmas, so when she had a great congregation in the Temple for the Christmas tree, she had four disciples hand her this big box, fixed up



WITH "Rosy"

with pink ribbons, and her mother climbed out of the box, and they cried for joy, and embraced one another, and then the organ pealed, and everyone knew they'd made-up."

I began to laugh, and once having begun, I could not stop. I laughed so much that I nearly fell off the bus. The more disapprovingly the young American stared at me, the more I laughed. I suppose he thought that I was mad. I was still laughing when I got off the bus, although I had by this time a pain in my side, and I was still laughing when I pealed my own bell, although there is nothing amusing about having lost one's latch-key. So stimulating, in fact, were my memories of Sister Aimée McPherson that my despairing mood vanished, and I was able to sit down and work until nearly four o'clock in the morning.

It occurred to me the next day that perhaps I became depressed when I was working because I did not go out enough, because I did not allow myself enough variety. I came to the conclusion that I had attached myself too readily to the Circus, and that I was allowing myself to fall far too easily into a rut, whatever a rut may be.

Therefore, for the next few months, whenever I was asked to a party, or to a cocktail-party, I accepted these invitations, and I sincerely tried to enjoy myself when I went out. If I did not do so, I cannot think that I am entirely to blame. I do not believe that you will find outside London so many stupid, spiteful, rich people. When I use the word rich, I mean that the people I refer to are able to entertain luxuriously not only their friends, but their acquaintances; not only the friends of their friends, but the acquaintances of their acquaintances.

These people, so far as I can ascertain, while inviting artists of every kind to their entertainments, are inclined to treat them with the good-humoured, rather surprised interest which I am sure that they accord to the panda at the Zoo.

"Oh, so he's the painter, is he?" and, after a pause, "well, I've often thought of taking up painting myself. I used to sketch, at one time, and it must be a pleasant way of making money."

No people in the world are more self-centred than this little clique to which I refer. They are, of course, most intrigued by knowing which of their friends are having love-affairs. As the friends in question are incredibly naive regarding their sex-life, such knowledge is soon common property, and I do not think they would have it otherwise, for what used to be known as the secrets of the alcove are definitely now the "confidences" of the cocktail-party. Without working, as film-stars have to work, these people nevertheless fight to live in exactly the same glare of paid publicity. Perhaps that explains their own gushing subservience to anyone connected with the movies. It is certain that nowadays the yes-man of any famous film-producer is likely to be a guest of honour in many stately homes of England, and if the films are not careful they will soon lose glamour as swiftly as the stage has done since it first began to mingle with society.

In the old days the theatre undoubtedly possessed an enchantment that has gone, now that footlights are no longer the rigid barrier they were when Pinero wrote *Trelawney of the Wells*. Perhaps golf has quite a lot to do with it. Can anyone imagine Duse with a handicap? Or the divine Sarah wearing tweeds? Or Irving fiddling with a putter?

No. When actors first ceased to be regarded as Rogues and Vagabonds, it seems to me that the first nail was struck into a hitherto solid coffin. Actors then became, and passionately desired to become, exactly like everyone else. They succeeded in their desire, and where is the glamour that the old-fashioned theatre once possessed? It seems to me, to-day, to be concentrated on two figures—the slight, shadowy form

of Mme. Ludmilla Pitöeff, and the larger, solid one of M. Sacha Guitry. Here, at least, are two theatrical personalities who could, in their entirely different ways, belong to no other profession.

It will indeed be a dreadful day when the Circus decides to become social. So far, I must frankly say, the Circus holds itself disdainfully aloof from such matters.

"The theatre?" said a clown to me, once, "what have we to do with them? People who have understudies ready to walk on for them when they're ill? People who need call-boys to tell them when they're 'on'?"

I do not in the least agree with these remarks. For me, the theatre has a magic that nothing in the world can ever supplant, and no film, however brilliant, will ever take the place of that triumphant make-believe that warmed men's hearts before Shakespeare himself was ever born or thought of.

If I were asked, to-day, whom I would choose to sit next to at dinner, I would unhesitatingly select C. B. Cochran, but I must in fairness add that this is not only because he is a man of the theatre. He can talk so entertainingly about everything that I love—Spanish gypsies, flamenco music, Duse, "Porgy," the Circus, the Rodeo, boxing, the fair-ground, the Ballet, and a hundred other vital forms of entertainment.

Yet it is as a great impresario of the theatre that Cochran is chiefly remarkable. How remarkable will perhaps only be known after his death. He tells me that theatrical times are hard, and that must surely be a sign that the theatre in England is in a sickly state, for Cochran brought us such varied attractions as Duse, the Habima Players, Bernhardt, the Lunts, the Guitrys, splendid revues with Spinelli, Noel Coward, Argentina, Edythe Baker, Florence Mills, the Russian Ballet, and Beatrice Lillie.

Not long ago I said to him :

"Why don't you bring over the Gypsy Theatre from Moscow?"

"I'd love to," said Cochran, "because I've seen them and they're magnificent. But if I did bring them over, who'd come to see them . . . you, myself, and about six other people. . . ."

KID SPIDER ARRIVES

ONE evening when I was working in London, the telephone rang.

I lived alone, with one maid, and as I took off the receiver, I heard a voice say:

"The Savoy Hotel wants Lady Eleanor Smith."

"I'm speaking."

"Lady Eleanor Smith? Oh. . . . Mr. Rosenthal wants to speak to you. Just one moment."

After a pause, a strange, uncouth voice said:

"That Lady Smith? My name's Rosenthal. I gotta see you quickly. How soon can you get here?"

"What do you want to see me about?" I asked puzzled.

"Business. But I can't speak over the 'phone. Can't you come right away?"

It occurred to me, not for the first time, that film people were somewhat peculiar.

"I'll come along at eight o'clock," I said, "but how shall I know you?"

"Because I don't look like nobody else," said the voice, finally, and rang off.

This intrigued me, and I arrived punctually at the Savoy Grill.

The Opera Season was in full swing, and the place was filled with overdressed, over-anxious women wobbling beneath the weight of unaccustomed tiaras. It was therefore difficult for me to find my film-man, and when at first I saw a gaping crowd of people, I most certainly did not

connect them with the person I had come to find. Then I perceived that these people were staring at a man who stood by himself, and who talked to himself; a wire-thin, hysterical creature with a shrivelled, coffee-coloured face and black, burning eyes; a taut, fidgety man, with a crooked mouth, a twitching cheek, and strange, flashy clothes. Some instinct told me that this was Mr. Rosenthal. I went across to him and told him my name.

"You hungry?"

"Yes," I said, "I haven't had any dinner."

"Then show me where to eat. Quick! Don't waste no time."

More perplexed than ever, I led the way in to the restaurant, where a waiter brought us menus.

"You can read, eh?" said my companion.

"Oh, yes," said I, thinking he was trying to be funny.

"Well, I can't, see? So order some food, quick, and some drink, but not for me, and then I'll talk to you."

I looked at him, and decided that he was a drug-addict craving for dope. As I thought this, a page-boy came across to him with an envelope, and he bolted from the room. I began to eat my dinner and wondered again why film companies sent over such eccentric representatives. After about twenty minutes' time, my companion returned. He was much calmer, but I could not help noticing how people turned to stare at him. His appearance was, however, decidedly eccentric. He himself ate hardly anything, but he continued to watch me with black, unblinking eyes.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, at length.

I began to lose my temper.

"You take drugs, don't you?" I said.

"Why does the lady say that?"

"It's obvious."

Silence ensued for ten minutes, after which he said:

"Who do you think I am?"

"Good heavens!" said I, "I suppose you're a film man, who wants to talk business, and I wish you'd start!"

"A film man! Christ!" was my companion's reply.

Quite suddenly I was conscious of something so evil that I felt uncomfortable. I longed, then, to run out of the room—this man was too hideous—I thought that I could no longer endure his company.

"Don't you know who I am?" he asked softly.

"I've told you—no."

"Did you never hear of Kid Spider?" pursued the soft, loathsome voice.

"Kid Spider?"

I started, for I had at one time read a number of New York tabloids, and I remembered all too vividly the adventures of this particular gangster.

"Weren't you with Al Capone?"

"I was—yeah. Al's in Alcatraz now. Maybe I helped put him there. . . ."

His smile was a snarl, revealing yellow jagged teeth, and this smile, combined with his twitch, and his dead black eyes, filled me with a repulsion I could scarcely conceal. Added to this his language was incredibly obscene, although I believe that he was unconscious of it.

"What do you want of me?" I asked.

He began to tell me a curious story. It appears that he had left Florida in a hurry, on account of some trouble regarding unpaid income tax, and he had now decided that he wished to settle in England.

"But why?" I asked, aghast at the very thought of such a plan.

"Maybe I'm fed to the teeth of consorting with illegal bums. I got plenty of potatoes—now I want to meet some of these Dukes and Duchesses and Lords, and I want to win that horse-race you call the Durby over here. Get me?"

My mind began to reel at the vision of Kid Spider leading in a Derby winner.

"I still don't see," said I, "how you got in touch with me?"

"You don't? Well, that's simple. On the boat coming here I got to thinking, and I figured out I'd do better if I started off by getting acquainted with some titled Judies, so I asked the library stooard, or whatever you call the guy if he knew any, and he gave me two names. Yours was one."

"Who was the other?"

"A dame called Lady Oxford. . . ."

I digested this information in silence.

"That's where you come in," continued the gangster, in tones of offensive familiarity, "if you fix me up with some of these Dukes and Duchesses, and find me some ancestral joint I can buy and live in—well, it'll be worth your while, that's all, and I just told you I had plenty of potatoes. What you got to say?"

"I'll think about it," said I, "but now I must go. I've got an appointment."

"Go? What do you mean—go? I just told you I don't know a soul in this dump—what you expect a guy to do—sit talking to himself all night?"

"I'm sorry," I said with firmness, "but I'm late, and I really must leave. Why don't you go to a cabaret or a night-club? The hotel would know all about them."

"Night-club!" jeered Kid Spider, "I owned the entire vice racket of Chicago, at one time! What would I want with a night-club?"

At this moment the bill appeared, and he pulled out a bundle of fifty-pound notes.

"I can't figure out this tom-fool dough! Pay the bill for me."

I did so, thinking that it would have been easy enough to rob Kid Spider, and then an idea came to me.

"Do you like to gamble?"

"Sure, I like to gamble. Why?"

"There are some gambling places here in London. I can't remember the address of the one I went to, but you'll find out easily enough. I expect the taxi-drivers know."

And with these light words I gladly made my escape, for I had never met a man quite so revolting, or quite so unlike my own conception of a gangster, which, being derived from the cinema, was based upon a combination of the genial personalities of Paul Muni and Edward G. Robinson.

The next morning I was working at my desk when the door-bell pealed. The maid was out marketing, and I was alone in the house, so I went to open the door. To my astonishment and dismay, Kid Spider stood on the step, and he appeared to be in the throes of an almost epileptic fury.

I tried to shut the door.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I'm working, and——"

He was too quick. With a swift, violent movement he pushed past me and was in the sitting-room before I knew what was happening.

"Now, look here——" I began.

He slammed the door, and stood in front of it. I had been right in my surmise. He was shaking with rage. His mouth was parted in a mirthless snarl, his eyes were glittering, and sweat beaded his forehead. A more horrifying spectacle I have never beheld.

He spat, and I mean that he literally spat:

"So you thought you could double-cross *me* and get away with it?"

Although I had no idea what he meant, it occurred to me that I was in a highly unpleasant situation. The maid would not be back for at least half an hour, and I did not suppose that she would be of much use when she did return. I eyed the telephone reflectively. It was a long way away. But I do not like people who spit on my carpet, so I said:

"I don't know what you're talking about. But your manners are vile, and I'm busy. Will you please go?"

He took not the slightest notice.

He said, his eyes fixed on my face:

"D'you know what I do to people who double-cross me? I do this. . . ."

He then proceeded to give a diabolically effective imitation of a machine-gun in action.

KID SPIDER PROPOSES

EXCELLENT although this imitation undoubtedly was, it was by no means one of which I could myself take a favourable view. In fact, it made my blood run cold. For aught I knew, the man, although certainly not armed with his favourite toy, a machine-gun, might be in possession of a revolver, or of a "shiv," as they call a knife in the English underworld. I did not, in any case, like the manner in which one hand lurked purposefully in his pocket. The fact that I had no idea what he was talking about did nothing to lessen my depression; I sat down, feeling rather weak about the knees.

"I don't know what you mean," I said. "Why do you say that I've double-crossed you?"

He came cautiously towards me, and thrust an evening-paper beneath my nose.

"I told you I can't read . . . but other people read this to me . . . and, anyway, I know I was in the can last night . . . what you got to say?"

I looked at the paper, and began to understand. I read:

"West End Gambling House raided . . . names of those detained. . . ."

Among the names was that of Daniel Rosenthal.

"Good heavens!" I said, "you surely don't suppose this is anything to do with me? You must be mad!"

He thrust his face close to mine.

"Who told me to go and gamble last night? Eh? Whose idea was it?"

"I told you I didn't know the address!"

"So you said, but I'm not a guy who trusts no one, and you could have had me tailed easy enough . . . maybe it seemed like a swell joke to you, to put Kid Spider in the can!"

I hastened to assure him that my sense of humour was by no means so debased as he seemed to suppose, but I have met, in my time, listeners more easily convinced than he was. Nothing I said could shake him. He was determined that I had "put him in the can," and although I suppose he ought to have been hanged at least fifteen times, this little matter seemed to rankle until I could only assume that he had, since his visit to England, lost all sense of proportion.

"Aw, shut your mouth!" he bellowed suddenly, in the middle of my explanation, and then, with a cunning glance across the room, he tiptoed over to the door, and opening it, listened for a moment. Naturally, he heard nothing—a desolate house is apt to give itself away—and he shut the door softly. Turning to me, his face still distorted with fury, he hissed:

"And now I'll show you just how we fix double-crossers. . . ."

His hand, I observed, was once more in his pocket. I sprang to my feet. It seemed to me utterly intolerable that this repulsive gangster should force his way into my home and murder me for something I had not even done. I think then that I was almost as angry as he was.

"You get out!" I cried, "get out of this house and never come back! Do you hear? Get out!"

He continued to eye me, motionless, save for his twitching cheek; his lips were still bared in the same menacing grin; he was too awful to be real; he was a guy, a heap of old clothes; he was an "Ugly-Wugly" straight from the pages of E. Nesbit.

"If you do kill me," I said, "they'll hang you by the neck

until you're dead—that's what they'll do to you! You're not in Chicago now, and nobody can save you. Nobody! Now will you get out?"

My rage ended as swiftly as it had begun. I was conscious then that I was trembling, and my hands felt clammy. I sat down again, rather more suddenly than I had anticipated.

Kid Spider once more advanced across the room towards me.

"You know what?"

I shook my head. I did not feel like talking.

"I'll tell *you* what! I never had anyone speak back to me like that since I can't remember. Never! We'll skip the double-crossing—that's what we'll do. But I'll marry you!"

Outside, the sun was shining, and there were pigeons fluttering in the trees that grew near my window.

"You'd better go," I said.

"Didn't you hear what I said?"

"Yes, but I do wish you'd *go*! I've got a lot of work to do."

Downstairs, I could hear a key turning in the back door, and I knew that the maid was back. One of the pigeons clattered noisily down onto the balcony by the open window.

"I tell you I'm going to marry you," Kid Spider persisted.

"I'm sorry. You can't. I'm engaged to be married to someone else."

"What's his name?"

"That's my affair."

"I'll fix him. No need to worry about him. But tell me on the level, you really are titled?"

"Yes," I said, faintly. It had been a long morning.

"It's funny," Kid Spider ruminated, his good humour—if you could ever describe him as good-humoured—suddenly restored, "I always thought of them as kind of tall and stately. . . ."

"Them?"

"Titled dolls. When'll we get married?"

"Please, will you go!"

"I don't feel like going. I feel like telling you something about myself. Listen, sweetie—and don't forget you're the only girl who ever talked back to me—did you ever hear of The Dion O'Bannion outfit?"

For an hour he sat there and talked to me of gangsters. His language was revolting, and his stories made Damon Runyon's sound like fairy-tales. I wish now that I could remember them, but I was suffering from a reaction which made me feel stupid and dazed. All I know is that his stories were of cold-blooded killing and revenge, and whenever he described some peculiarly brutal murder, he cackled mirthlessly, and his little eyes glittered.

"So we tied him up in a sack, and left him on the dump, just as I'm telling you, and you can bet he never squealed again. . . ."

Or:

"We set fire to the flivver, and if this guy was burned up inside it, well . . . no one ever knew, and he couldn't testify after that . . . he was surely taken for a ride . . . he was so badly frazzled nobody couldn't identify him afterwards . . . we laughed plenty. . . ."

Or:

"That kid was never any good, so we slit up his nostrils the way no doll would fancy him again. . . ."

After some time I said:

"I must go now, and so must you. I'm lunching out. . . ."

He grinned again.

"Take me along!"

"I can't," I said, "it's a business lunch."

"Ashamed of me, eh? Don't forget I'm going to marry you, sweetie!"

When at last he had gone, I sat down in an arm-chair to review the situation. It seemed to me unlikely that he would return, but perhaps in this case the wish must have

been father to the thought, for he was telephoning a few hours later. The next day he turned up when I was talking to some friends, and one woman screamed loudly at the sight of his face. I cannot blame her. I hid him upstairs, making some excuse to my guests.

I said to him:

"Please, will you not come here without telephoning?"

"What's wrong with me, sugar?"

"Oh, for God's sake, will you get out of this house, and *stay out*?"

But he wouldn't, and dreading the time when he would exhaust his supply of drugs and inevitably lose his temper, I went round to see an acquaintance at Scotland Yard.

Here I found that they took a serious view of the situation. In order to get the Spider deported, they tried to get me to make a charge against him. They wanted me to say that he had falsely represented himself as a film-producer. Naturally, I refused to do any such thing. I pointed out that I myself had connected him with films—he himself had never mentioned them. Nor did I touch on the horrible moments I had endured when he thought that I had double-crossed him. I merely asked to see his *dossier*, and there I discovered that what he had said about himself was absolutely true. I also discovered that he was wanted in France for murder.

The next time that he appeared, I could not help observing that the house was watched by a detective. Sure enough, an inspector came round the next day to warn me against associating with this international criminal, and once again I was told that it would simplify matters if I would consent to charge him with misrepresentation.

But I was firm. This I could not do. Much as I loathed Kid Spider I did not consider myself justified in charging him with something that he had not done. However, the next time he telephoned me, I said:

"You can't come and see me again because I'm going away for a long time, and by the way, I shouldn't ever go to France, if I were you."

"What's France?"

"Oh, it's just a place in Europe," and I rang off.

When I came back from Roumania I learned that Kid Spider's passion for gambling had in the end been his undoing. He had apparently boarded an aeroplane for Le Touquet without for a moment supposing that Le Touquet was not an English possession.

When he set foot on French territory two "flics" awaited him, and he was tapped upon the shoulder. I believe that he now languishes for life upon Devil's Island.

All I know is that the officials of Scotland Yard, after this adventure, were disposed to regard me rather coldly, and this seems to me a little hard.

After all, I told them at the time that one day I would write about Kid Spider. If their ever-watchful eye should fall upon this page, they will know that I was telling them the truth.

•

BALKAN JOURNEY

I WANDERED about Roumania for weeks, and became passionately attached to this country. Transylvania, itself, was fascinating enough; it was the land of Dracula, straight from the pages of Bram Stoker, complete with crags, gloomy forests, and desolate, Byronic castles. Even the villages played up; the cottages had wreaths of garlic hung above their doors, and nobody would venture in the churchyards after dark.

In one village I succeeded in discovering two authoritative persons, the priest and the doctor, who swore to having encountered a vampire.

The priest, who spoke bad French, said to me:

"I don't like talking about this, but it happened about fifteen years ago, and not only the doctor and myself, but several people still in the village remember exactly how it came to happen. The Boyar, or lord of the castle, was at that time a widower, but he spent more time in Paris than he did with his daughter, who was brought up by her old nurse, a gypsy woman who had been for many years in the family of which I am speaking.

"Now, the daughter was a beautiful girl with long golden hair that she could sit on. She could scarcely read and write, so long had she been neglected by her father, and when she was sixteen, in many ways she was more like a girl of twelve.

"As luck would have it, it was about this time that the nurse's son came to visit his mother. He had not seen her for many years. He was a handsome young gypsy with long black hair, white teeth, and a coat of leopard skin. He rode

a black stallion, and he made a fine enough appearance, but funnily enough the village-people couldn't abide him from the first moment, although there were plenty of *lei* in his pockets, and although they were all fond enough of his mother, the nurse.

"Well, the night he arrived, he stabled his horse at the inn across the way, and then he went up to the castle, to see his mother. It was winter, and the snow lay as thick as sugar-icing over the gardens up at the castle, and the lake was frozen over. There was a full moon, too, I remember—it must have looked something like the theatre in Bucharest, which I have never seen.

"The young man came up to the front door, and there, it seems, he stopped, forgetting all about his mother, for the window was uncurtained on the ground-floor, and it was lighted-up. He looked in through this window, and there the Boyar's daughter sat, playing the piano. There was a great cluster of candles to light her, and they must have sparkled on the long gold plaits of her hair, that were still hanging down her back—she had to put them out of the way so that she didn't sit on them.

"The young gypsy had never seen anything like this before, and it seems that he tapped upon the window. She came across, and asked him who he was. We don't know what he said, but we do know that he got her to put on a cloak and come out with him in the snow, all this, of course, without the nurse knowing."

The priest was silent for a moment, as he sipped his glass of *tuica*.

"My wife tells me," he said at length, "that the Boyar's daughter's cloak was made of Russian sables, and reached to her heels. My wife says it belonged to her mother, and that you can't get things like that nowadays, but of course I know nothing of such things . . . all that I know is the fact that this girl and the young gypsy met every night for many nights,

and afterwards, when the nurse said she knew nothing about it, the nurse was lying.

"One night, however, the Boyar himself arrived in his motor-car from Bucharest, and it is said that he caught them together. In any case there was a terrible scene. The gypsy was stripped and flogged in the snow, by grooms from the castle, and the nurse was turned away that same night. One thing is certain—the gypsy and his black stallion were never seen again, but from that day the young girl began to pine away . . . you will say that love caused her decline, but there are peasants to-day in the village who were servants, then, up at the castle, and who noticed the two red, angry sores, like the marks of a snake-bite, upon her throat . . . in any case, she died, and I myself committed her body to earth, and her soul to heaven, but the fact remains that several people, including myself and the doctor, have seen her since. . . ."

"As a ghost?" I asked.

"Not exactly. In her shroud, with her gold hair streaming down her back, but with her face pale and ravaged like a fiend's, and her mouth streaming with blood."

"How horrible. . . ."

"Please don't mention this in front of my wife, who is a very educated woman, and who hates such stories, but she has been seen in the churchyard, scratching with her long nails at the graves of children who have been freshly buried . . . the next morning the marks are there, and it is impossible to deny that the graves have been desecrated."

The priest shook his head, and drained his glass of *tuica*.

"Is the castle empty now?" I asked.

"No. The Boyar sold it after the death of his daughter, and it was bought by a rich man who made a fortune in oil, and who is married to a French woman. They live in Paris, and only come here for the shooting. So perhaps I was wrong in saying that the castle was still inhabited."

At this moment the priest's wife came in, carrying an oil-

lamp. She pretended to be lighting a candle before the ikon, but I observed that she cast a sharp glance in her husband's direction. She put the lamp down on a table, where moths began to tumble above the blur of light. The long summer day was nearly over.

The priest's wife asked, in her guttural, fluent French :

"I suppose my husband has been telling you some pack of old wives' tales?"

"Oh, no," said I, "we were talking about gypsies."

The priest said nothing, and she continued, as though I had not spoken :

"The people round about here still belong to a medieval age. Witchcraft, vampires . . . well, that comes of living beneath a feudal system, I suppose. Personally, I have little patience with that sort of thing, but then you see, I was educated in Vienna. That makes a difference."

"Of course," I said, "it must," and soon afterwards I took my leave of the couple. As I left the house, I could not help noticing that a wreath of withered garlic-flowers hung above the door of this highly educated lady's house.

The gypsies of Roumania were, I found, magnificent examples of their race. The strangest of all were the Laeshi, a tribe so secretive and so savage that even the other gypsies were afraid of them.

The Laeshi live apart from other members of their own race, and are always to be found hidden in the deepest thickets, the most impenetrable ravines. They never seem to come near towns or villages, and so far as I can ascertain, they must live entirely on birds and animals slain in the forest, or fruit and nuts pulled from the trees. I think they are too wild even to sleep beneath the rough shelter of tents, and it is quite certain that they would not dare to venture beneath the roof of even the most gaily-painted caravan.

Many of the nomad Roumanian gypsies wander from village to village with huge dancing-bears shuffling at their

heels. They are expert fiddlers, and provide the music for weddings and other peasant junketings. The sedentary gypsies of Bucharest are often flower-sellers, brown, barefooted girls who squat on the pavements, their arms heaped with blossom, and their men are musicians. The majority are, of course, violinists, but I came across several who played reed Panpipes, producing from these crude-looking instruments sounds I found wild and haunting and curiously sweet. I was particularly struck by the tolerance with which gypsies were treated by the Roumanians; not even in Hungary or Spain have they come to be so much a part of national life, and perhaps this is why existence in Roumania is more colourful than that of any other country I know.

Someone once described Bucharest to me as a cross between Buenos Aires and pre-war Moscow; I have never been to either, so I cannot tell how far the description is justified, but life in Bucharest reminded me personally of "The Merry Widow." It was cinematic; the moon was theatrical, and so were the open-air cafés, where gypsies' violins throbbed passionately beneath the stars; where young officers danced in gorgeous, brilliant uniforms, and where flower-sellers wandered about with sheaves of sweet-smelling carnations. Late at night we would drive back to the hotel in fiacres piled full of these flowers, and the fiacre-drivers were, in accordance with an old custom, eunuchs, dressed always, no matter how hot it was, in velvet Russian jackets, with high fur caps perched upon their heads.

Even when I was arrested, I still enjoyed myself. I was arrested because my passport described me as a journalist, and I had failed to comply with some technical regularity or other. I was finally released by a kind Roumanian friend after spending some time in a rather agreeable police-station.

I explained to my friend that I had been much angrier in Rome, where I was arrested for walking about the streets—in a heat wave—in a dress with no sleeves.

"Of course you couldn't have been arrested for that," said my friend, "there must have been more to the story."

"There wasn't," I protested, "an old mad woman kept on following me and shouting out that she didn't know what girls were coming to. At last she fetched a policeman, and by that time anyone would have been annoyed. The policeman was, and so was I. At last I gave the old woman a push, merely to get rid of her, but unfortunately she over-balanced and sat down very hard indeed in the gutter. She made such a fuss then that the policeman arrested us both. It took me hours to get away. But it certainly wasn't my fault."

"Perhaps not," said my friend, with an odd look.

THE DRUNKEN CONSUL

I WENT away to the Black Sea, where I was unlucky enough, in Constanza, to discover a hotel invaded by bed-bugs; fleeing precipitately, I discovered an enchanting seaside-place called Eforia. No people are more friendly than the Roumanians; no people understand better how to make the most of a holiday. All day long we swam in the clear cornflower sea; we picnicked on long, wet stretches of sand, and were soon burned chestnut-brown. At dusk, we wandered across to stalls where they sold hot corn on the cob, and at night we danced out-of-doors to gypsy music.

I motored all the way through Jugoslavia, where I enjoyed stopping at the Turkish village "Kaftans," drinking coffee with men who still wore the fez, and whose women were completely veiled. We conversed amiably by signs, and I ate a great many sickening sweetmeats. At last we arrived in one big town, where to my horror I discovered that some money I had been expecting had not arrived; it was Saturday, the banks were closing until Monday, and I had about twopence in the world. I decided to see the English Consul, among whose duties, I knew, was the doubtless unpleasant one of succouring destitute Britons.

The Consul was a sorrowful-looking Levantine. He looked even sadder when I had finished my story, which I must admit was scarcely calculated to cheer him up. I showed him my passport, and assured him that it was merely a question of waiting until Monday. I promised him a cheque. With a deep sigh, he buried his hands into his pockets, producing from each one a few crumpled notes. He then

excavated somewhere in his waistcoat, where he fished out some silver coins. He handed me these with the tragic eyes of a monkey. By this time I felt slightly uncomfortable, but he had not yet finished. Sighing deeply, he rose and went across to where an alpaca jacket hung upon a peg; with a smothered groan, he plunged his hand into one of the pockets, returning wanly with a creased and grimy five-pound note. Silently, he offered me the note.

By this time, I myself was nearly in tears, so deeply was I in sympathy with the unfortunate Consul; when I had completed the formality of writing out my cheque, I suggested that he should come with me to the neighbouring hotel, where Prince Vsevelode of Russia was entertaining a few friends for cocktails. He agreed, with an expression of suffering more poignant than any I had yet seen, and when he had fetched his hat, we walked off down the street looking exactly as though we had both been attending a funeral.

For some time we walked in silence through the thick white dust. Veiled women, looking like black phantoms, passed us with the silence of shadows; pariah dogs scratched their fleas in the middle of the road, and the Turkish Kaftans brooded in the twilit silence. They were nearly always silent, I had noticed; the clash and glitter of the Roumanian cafés already seemed far away.

"Do you like being here?" I asked at length.

"No."

"Where were you before?"

"Zagreb."

"Was that better?"

"No."

"Perhaps," I thought to myself, "a drink will do him good."

We turned into the hotel, one of those derelict, semi-Oriental, red-plush affairs, that succeed in looking like nothing so much as a long-deserted brothel.

Here Prince Vsevelode was playing host to a number of sad, dignified-looking Russians from the colony nearby. I introduced the Consul, and after having struggled once again in monosyllabic and agonizing conversation, I left him to his *slévovitz* while I began talking to two of the Russians. After about twenty minutes' time I suddenly heard in my ear the whisper of a soft, lascivious voice:

"Petite femme en feu. . . ."

I turned, and to my astonishment beheld the Consul.

"Vous seriez plus en feu . . . on va danser."

He was very drunk.

He began clapping his hands until a seedy waiter appeared, and to the waiter he barked some unintelligible order which resulted in the appearance of an extremely decrepit gramophone with a huge green horn.

"De la musique!" yelled the Consul.

The record—the unique record—produced was, so far as I remember, "Frankie and Johnny."

The Consul grabbed me, and we began solemnly to revolve upon the stone floor. The seedy waiter, the chef, and several veiled women collected in an awestruck group upon the threshold, while the Russians looked slightly taken aback. After a moment, however, they went on talking in their soft, sibilant voices about life under the Tsarist régime. For some reason or other this appeared to annoy the Consul.

"Que tout le monde danse!" he roared furiously.

As nobody seemed willing to accede to this request, he suddenly abandoned me and rushed forwards towards a beautiful old lady with a curving bust, a pale, aristocratic face, and hair done rather like Marie-Antoinette's. Dragging her to her feet, he proceeded to whirl her round rather in the manner of a dancing Dervish, and the fact that the gramophone had run down in no way seemed to hamper his activities. It was of course inevitable that he should before very long bring his partner crashing down upon the back

of her head, a *contretemps* that caused him to laugh very heartily.

During the ensuing confusion, while smelling-salts were held under the old lady's nose—she seemed to me gravely concussed—my host said to me with excusable indignation:

"What on earth did you want to bring that lunatic here for?"

"He seemed so sad," I said, and was conscious that the explanation was, to say the least of it, inadequate.

That night we went down to the station. The Orient Express was due, and there were some people on the train that we wanted to see. As I stood talking through a window to my friends, I heard a terrific hullabaloo behind me, and turning, beheld the Consul crawling on all fours across the rails. To my surprise, he managed at length to scramble upon the platform, where he stood swaying, powdered white with dust, and apparently delivering a passionate lecture in the Serbian language. He then began to walk, or rather totter, purposefully down the platform, but the effort was too great, and he fell flat on his face, where he continued to lie.

Nobody made any attempt to pick him up, and, for my part, I had had quite enough of him. But I could not help turning, as I left the station. He was quite comfortable; someone had had the forethought to place an old-fashioned string bag beneath his head, and there, for aught I know, he still lies snoring.

Shortly afterwards, in a town near Sarajevo, I was sitting in a café, eating an ice and trying to write a letter, when I suddenly heard, from the shuttered windows of a house opposite, the clatter of Spanish castanets.

The sound was strange enough, in this remote, Turkish town. I stopped writing, and reflected:

"There must be a Spanish dancer working in the local night-club here. That's it—of course she's practising for

to-night. She's rather good—I wish we could wait to see her."

Soon the castanets stopped, and I continued my letter. In about fifteen minutes' time the door opposite opened, and from it emerged, to my amazement, Aurora, the gypsy girl who so often visited me in London.

"Aurora!" I gasped.

"Oh, hullo, Eléonore," said Aurora, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for us to meet in the wilds of Bosnia, "how lovely to see you—can I have an ice-cream too?"

"Are you dancing here?"

"Well, I was, but now that I've met you, *niña*, I think I shall scrap my contract, and go on with you wherever you're going. I don't like this country very much. Don't you think it would be fun to go to Poland? I've never been to Poland. Have you?"

"No, but what made you come here in the first place?"

"Oh, that's a long story," Aurora declared, sticking two red combs into her jetty mane of hair as she coquettishly eyed a tired-looking officer crossing the street, "and concerns my *fiancé*, who is Yugoslav. He thought I ought to see his country."

"But," said I, "you told me distinctly that your *fiancé* was a Neapolitan fire-eater?"

"Oh, that's all off—didn't I write and tell you? No, I met this Yugoslav when I was dancing in Nice, and he persuaded me to sign this contract, curse him. Anyhow, we quarrelled, and so I'm not engaged to him any more. And I hate working here, Eléonore—there's no money in it, and no fun. Let's go to Poland!"

"Don't be so unreasonable, Aurora!" I protested "I've been in the Balkans for months! I've got to go back to England and write a book."

"I think it's you that are unreasonable, *niña*. You could

write a book just as well in Poland as you could in England. Or we might go to Seville. That would inspire you to write a good book."

"I haven't got any money," said I, "I've just got enough to get myself to England. There, if I turn up at a film studio, I'll get something for supervising a film of mine that they're going to do."

Aurora concentrated, frowning.

"Would there be a part for me, in your film?"

I shook my head.

"No, you see, it's a gypsy film. They wouldn't recognize a real *gitana* if they saw one."

"I'll lend you some money. We'll pawn my gold bracelets."

"If we pawned them here, we wouldn't get enough to go five miles."

"That's true," the gypsy girl admitted.

We sat for some time in gloomy silence.

"Are you really going to England, Eléonore?"

"Yes, I must. Are you really going to Poland?"

"I might as well."

A few months later I ran into Aurora in Berlin.

"Hullo," I said, "how did you like Poland?"

"Poland?" she echoed, with an expression of blank astonishment, "what do you mean—Poland? Why should I go to Poland?"

"Well, where *have* you been, since I saw you last?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I've been in Prague. It's lovely there, Eléonore—and what do you think—I've got such a *simpatico* Czecho-Slovak *fiancé*!"

LIMEHOUSE BLUES

IT has always been a mystery to know why film companies buy novels that they have no intention of reproducing upon the screen. It is not even in some cases for the title of the novel purchased, as frequently the title is changed. God knows it is not for the story, for it is seldom indeed that any vestige of the story remains. If it is for the author's name, then the mystery becomes even greater, for the author is usually accorded a smaller "credit-title" than that given to the property-boy. In many cases he feels that this is perhaps as well.

However you look at it, the author is rightly or wrongly considered by film-companies as the lowest form of animal life.

David Copperfield was a shining example to the directors of most filmed novels, and so was *Little Women*, but then Mr. George Cukor is a remarkable director. I can remember two of my favourite novels, Somerset Maugham's *Painted Veil* and Compton Mackenzie's *Sylvia Scarlett*, the film versions of which would have been tragic had they not been ludicrous. In any case, I bitterly grudged having spent money to see them.

It is a commonplace that filmed plays are seldom successful. I cannot myself agree that the filmed novel is any more happily inspired. The cinema needs swift, clear-cut stories expressly created for its own admirable methods of interpretation, and the novelist is usually even worse equipped than is the playwright to write these stories. The art of scenario-writing—and it is an art—is best demonstrated by

people who have, so to speak, grown up in the muddled, gaudy world of the cinema. They know what they are doing, and how seldom it is that they go wrong.

But filming is usually a melancholy business for the novelist whose book is being filmed. I certainly found it so.

After some impotent, sullen days, I went away from the studio to dine with a Roumanian actor who was playing a small part in the picture of which I am writing.

"Listen," said the Roumanian, "I've never been to Limehouse. Shall we go down there after dinner?"

"If you like," I said, "but I warn you you'll be disappointed. It's extremely depressing, and there aren't nearly so many Chinese about nowadays."

"All the same, I'd like to see it," declared the Roumanian, who was a big, powerful ex-boxer, well able to take care of himself—and me—I thought, even had Chinatown been all that Thomas Burke has described it as being.

So after dinner we boarded a bus, and went jolting down the Strand in the direction of the East End. It is a long bus drive to Limehouse, and when at last we arrived in East India Dock Road it was after ten o'clock. This was pointed out to me by a large policeman to whom I had mistakenly applied for local colour.

"It's after closing-time," the policeman proclaimed, stolidly, "and if it's beer you're after, then you can see very well for yourselves that you won't get it. Not here, you won't, that is."

The Roumanian was looking bewildered, as well he might, while I experienced all the shame habitual to English people at such moments. Furthermore, the policeman's complacency was too exasperating to endure for another moment.

"Oh, come on!" I said impatiently to the Roumanian.

We walked off, and suddenly found ourselves passing a brightly lit tea-house.

"Let us at least go in here for a cup of coffee," my friend urged.

"If you like. . ."

Inside, the restaurant was packed, and the air was thick and blue with smoke. A number of Chinese were sitting with white women, and all the tables were occupied. At last we sat down at a table with a girl, obviously a prostitute, and a good-looking young man with blue eyes and a sunburnt face.

"I thought," said the Roumanian to me, in French, "that you said there weren't many Chinese in this part of the world?"

"I had no idea there were so many."

At this moment the girl leaned towards me.

"Foreign?" she inquired.

"My friend is," I replied, prudently assuming a slight Cockney accent.

She was a plump girl, rather like a pink fondant, with frizzed hair and lipstick plastered all over her mouth.

"Is he French?"

"No. He's Roumanian."

"Well, I never! Has he got a harem?"

"Yes," said my friend, to this.

"Do you hear that, Scotty?" said the girl to her companion, "this bloke's got a harem, in his own country." And, to the Roumanian, "How many wives are there in it, Mister?"

"Only two," he replied.

I thought she seemed rather disappointed. I said to her:

"We thought we'd like a glass of beer, but it seems to be after closing-time, so we're unlucky."

"After time?" echoed the girl, "what's that got to do with it? Scotty and me are going off to have one in two two's. What say you and your chum come along?"

"I'd be charmed," said Scotty, at this point, "me and

Maude was just moving anyway. We'll all go together. The more the merrier, I always say."

We agreed to go with them, and set forth immediately. We walked for nearly a mile through dark, narrow, Jack-the-Ripper alleys.

"Where are we going?" I asked at length.

"Hell's Kitchen," answered the girl called Maude, "it's ever such a nice place. Do you mean to say you've never been there before?"

We finally found ourselves in a long, dark room, dimly lit by gas. We passed through a stream of beaded curtains into an inner room where coloured men of various hues sat drinking quietly at little tables. There were no other women, with the exception of the waitresses, who were Indians in native dress, with long black hair hanging like ponies' tails down their backs. They all seemed to know Maude, and we sat down at a table. They brought us some bottles of beer, and Maude said:

"It's funny I never saw you around here before."

"I've been away for some time," I said hastily.

"That's a good-looking boy, your friend," she said, "how do you fancy mine?"

"Very much," said I.

She leaned confidentially across the table.

"He's from Glasgow. He's steward on a Union Castle. He sails to-morrow."

"You'll miss him very much?" I suggested.

"Oh, well, here to-day and gone to-morrow, as you know very well for yourself, I dare say, and it'd never do if fellows outstayed their welcome. Well, I mean, would it?"

At this moment a commotion sounded behind us, and when we turned round we saw that the Indian women had pulled open a large trap-door in the floor. The door opened with a clatter, revealing a ladder staircase leading apparently into the bowels of the earth. No sooner was this staircase

revealed than about ten of the men in the room got up in silence and filed quietly out of sight. I thought it wiser to make no comment, and by this time the Roumanian and Scotty were talking so amicably about boxing that they noticed nothing.

While I drank my beer I watched new customers come into the gloomy room, and I observed that with one accord they vanished down the mysterious staircase. There were Chinese, with flat yellow faces and brilliant black eyes. There were little wiry Lascars, wearing fantastic turbans of candy-pink and gold. There were several buck niggers, swaggering in flash suits. There were one or two white men, but they were in the minority. Wherever they went, when they vanished below, they were completely silent, and suddenly the gas-lit room seemed sinister.

The girl Maude touched my arm.

"Listen, do you talk back-slang?"

"I understand it."

She continued, now speaking this *argot* that I had once learned on the fairground.

"Does your chum smoke?"

"Smoke? Opium? No! Why?"

"They're smoking down there. Down the stairs. Scotty doesn't smoke neither. Anyway, I want to get him back—he sails to-morrow. But that's not all—I'll give you a tip."

She sank her voice into a hoarse whisper.

"What is it?" I asked, feeling by this time somewhat apprehensive.

"Listen. . . . The 'busies' are coming in here to-night to make a raid . . . it's not twelve yet, but we'd better get out in about ten minutes unless we want to be pinched!"

"Good Heavens!" I gasped, appalled at the thought of being raided by the police in an opium-den, "why wait ten minutes? Let's go now!"

"There's no hurry," Maude insisted, "no hurry at all,

there isn't. We've got more than a quarter of an hour to spare."

But by this time my nerves were badly shaken, and I insisted on the bill being paid. Scotty was determined to pay his share, and I thought that he and the Roumanian would never stop arguing.

Never have I been more relieved to find myself in the fresh air. We walked away down the dark, deserted streets, leaving Hell's Kitchen behind us, and Maude said:

"Where are you two off to?"

"Piccadilly," I answered promptly.

Maude was astonished.

"You're never going up West at this time of night?"

When she saw that we were really serious, she and Scotty came as far as the 'bus to see us off, and we all parted on cordial terms.

A few months later, when I was travelling on a Union Castle ship and occupying a table with some rather pompous people, it occurred to me that one of the dining-room stewards seemed vaguely familiar. After racking my brains for some time, I suddenly, and not without discomfiture, recognized Scotty. I suppose I must have blushed, as we looked at one another; in any case, although Scotty's face remained rigidly respectful, it was impossible not to notice a swift, expressive wink. . . .

I thought of Hell's Kitchen, and I could not help laughing.

“BALLERINA”

ABOUT this time I went away with the tour of a play based on one of my books, *Ballerina*. We went to Manchester, Glasgow, and Liverpool. The play was an elaborate affair adapted by that intelligent young dramatist, Rodney Ackland. Rodney has since proved with *Birthday*, *After October* and *The White Guard*, of what fine work he is capable; in this case, however, I think he will agree with me that his experience was not then great enough to tackle the problems of cutting such a wealth of excellent material as he had accumulated in his own adaptation.

Rodney loved his scenes so much that he sweated blood at the idea of cutting so much as a line; he is a sensitive, highly-strung creature, and when several scenes were drastically removed from the play, he made himself ill. He fumed and fretted during rehearsal; he stamped up and down the empty auditorium, white-faced, and wild-eyed; at such moments I, as the author of the book, was invariably sent to plead and reason with him. I was by no means always successful. Indeed, I think a Napoleon was needed to deal with the situations that occurred almost daily.

The pity is that Rodney would have written a lovely play had he concentrated more upon the story of the dancer and less upon her early history. The second, and last act, of *Ballerina* was beautiful, swift, and moving; it was the first act that dragged, and such matters should, after all, have been rectified by those in higher authority. Rodney himself

contributed greatly to the second act by playing, with a spiteful brilliance, the part of the Ballerina's hunchback son. This performance was perfect.

Two old friends of mine, Frances Doble, and Anton (Pat) Dolin, co-starred in *Ballerina*. Frances, in addition to playing a huge, exacting, emotional part—she incidentally had fifteen changes of costume—was deeply involved in the business side of the production, which was one of the greatest responsibility and worry. As though that were not enough, she actually danced in the ballet at the end of the play, and she danced well enough not only to convince the public, but also to convince the most critical audience we ever had—the de Basil Company of Russian Ballet.

Frances gave during the last act of the play, a lovely, moving performance. In Manchester her success was phenomenal, and her notices all any actress could desire. Even the most majestic critic of all proclaimed that her performance was "a triumph not far removed from genius." It was later, when various changes had been made in the direction, and the business side of the production became in itself a full-time job, that the first part of her performance suffered.

By the time we got to London Frances was exhausted and ill, with the result that on the first night at the Gaiety she never began to "get going" until the second and last act, when she recovered all the beautiful qualities of her original performance, never again to lose them. Unfortunately, the critics wrote their notices after the first part of the show and some notices were not charitable. I always regret that they did not wait to see her as the old, defeated dancer, and I regret still more that they did not see her dance, with Dolin, the ballet of the "Snowbird", for I know of no other actress in London who could have combined these two feats.

Pat Dolin was a tower of strength.

He not only devised and produced and danced in the ballets that were so much a part of the production, but he himself gave an excellent performance as the dancer, "Borek." Pat is hot-headed and temperamental. But he is one of the best workers I ever met in my life, and I sincerely hope to work with him again. Unlike many dancers, Pat is strictly punctual. When he tells you that a ballet will be ready on a certain day at ten o'clock, you can be convinced that at five minutes to ten Pat and his ballet will be waiting impatiently.

Three of his pupils have become famous since first they appeared in *Ballerina*. They are Wendy Toye, Frederic Franklin, and Brigitta, now known to film-fans as Vera Zorina.

Brigitta first came to us as a shy, Garbo-like child of fifteen. She played "Rosa," the young dancer, whose success means tragedy to the ageing, jealous "Varsovina." Brigitta's own success was instantaneous, and I do not think that she has ever looked back. Wendy Toye is now well-known not only as a dancer, but as a choreographer, while Freddy Franklin is a successful member of the Russian Ballet. In those days he was Pat's understudy.

Henry Sullivan wrote the score of "Ballerina" recapturing, almost wistfully, the delicate ballet-music of the 'forties and 'fifties. He and Pat did not always agree, and whenever they quarrelled, which was frequently, I seemed to be sitting between them. Nor did "Hank," (Henry Sullivan) get on very much better with Rodney. Sometimes the three of them fought, and then I fought with all of them. On one occasion, in someone's dressing-room, Rodney took off his property-hump and hurled it at Hank. But our quarrels, although they seemed serious enough at the time, never lasted very long, and we are all good friends to-day.

Once, at a dress-rehearsal at the Scala Theatre, something happened that made a profound impression upon my mind.

If I had been the only person to see what I saw, I should be willing to dismiss the whole matter as an illusion. But I was not alone; Pat was with me, and saw it, too; Charles Landstone, our level-headed business manager, was another witness, so was Hank, so was Hank's manager, Ralph Glover.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, and the auditorium was dark and empty. The five of us sat together in the dress-circle, watching the final rehearsal of the "Snow-bird" Ballet. Pat had purposely put on his understudy, Freddy Franklin, because he wanted to watch, in complete concentration, Frances's efforts as a dancer.

I have explained before that watching Pavlova from the side of the stage had inspired me to write "Ballerina." Had I not watched Pavlova so closely that day at Golders Green, the book would never have been written, although my heroine's private life was, of course, pure fiction, borrowing nothing from the greatest ballerina of all. At the same time, I think that Pavlova had either directly or indirectly inspired us all, and Pavlova was dead. She had certainly inspired Pat, Frances, and myself.

The stage revolved to show a woodland glade, with nymphs in white tarlatan grouped in a traditional entrance. Previously, we had seen "Varsovina" haggard and dejected in her dressing-room, wrapped, shivering, in her shabby grey dressing-gown. Now, as we watched, a slight figure walked on to the stage. A figure snow-white in a fluffy *tutu*, its head bound with swans' plumage. The figure paused, crossing itself. It seemed to me that Frances had grown much smaller.

Then, as it glided into the spotlight, I caught my breath.

For the figure was not that of Frances. It had assumed the form of Anna Pavlova.

Pat gripped my hand until I thought he would break it.

I looked at him; he was ice-pale, and there was sweat on his face.

He muttered:

"This is uncanny . . . it's awful . . . what have we done? Oh, God—why did we ever bring up the past?"

The white form on the stage stood effortlessly upon one "*pointe*"; it pirouetted three times—a thing Frances could not do—and drifted like swansdown into "Borek's" arms, as the curtain fell. I looked again at my companions. They were white and dazed.

Somebody mumbled:

"We're all very tired . . . don't let's imagine things. . . ."

Somebody else said:

"We can't *all* have seen—what we saw. . . ."

Pat and I ran to the pass-door.

We were afraid.

Frances stood there on the stage, and said to Pat in a perplexed, mechanical voice:

"Pat, I'm sorry . . . let's take it again."

"Take it again? Why?"

"I couldn't dance. I must be awfully tired. My mind suddenly seemed to go blank. Will someone get me a glass of water?"

Pat gave me a warning look, and we said nothing at the time.

Later he affirmed:

"We can't deny it. For a moment that particular spirit from the past took possession of Frances's mind and body."

I was silent, for at the time it occurred to me that what we had seen was an unfavourable omen.

Later on I mentioned this to Lydia Kyasht, who was playing with great charm in the prologue of our play.

Lydia grew white, and said:

"I saw what you all saw. I was in front—hidden away in the pit. I saw it, too. . . ."

Lydia Kyasht is one of the most delightful and least temperamental of ballerinas. As a companion she was a joy, especially to me, for she amused me for hours with fascinating stories of the Imperial Ballet School at Petersburg.

I said once:

"Weren't you all very shy, when you made your *débuts*, after living as though you were in a convent, for so many years? How did you ever begin to be grown-up?"

Kyasht smiled, reminiscently.

"There were always the Grand Dukes. . . ."

When we were playing "Ballerina" in London, a curious situation arose. I have explained before that "Varsovina," the ageing ballerina, no longer feels that she can compete against the triumphant young *danseuse*, "Rosa."

Frances, playing "Varsovina," was, of course, a young and beautiful woman, but she was ill and distracted by all the worries of the production. She often felt that she could no longer struggle on. That she did so, and that she worked so magnificently, is a tribute to her courageous determination not to let down the company. But she felt, I know, that life was sometimes very hard.

The fifteen-year-old Brigitta, on the other hand, was making her first appearance in a speaking part, and for the first time in her life she was enjoying the excitements of a big success.

She did not play "Rosa"; she *was* "Rosa," and sometimes we felt that Frances was not playing the tired, tragic woman of those last scenes; she *was* that woman. "Ballerina" was a play within a play.

On the last night, Frances untied her pink ballet-shoes, kicked them away, stretched her weary feet, and declared, suddenly:

"I shall never walk upon the stage again so long as I live."

She never has.

To-day I often hear people express surprise that an actress so popular should have retired at the early age of thirty. The answer lies in one word: “Ballerina.”

To-day she lives in Spain.

PART IV

TRAMP SHIP

IT was with Frances, incidentally, that I myself returned to Spain, after finishing the book on which I was working. We travelled comfortably as far as Barcelona, where, after spending a few days with some friends, we boarded a Portuguese tramp, bound, eventually, for Lisbon. In addition to fruit, this ship carried a cargo of wild animals, destined, I remember, for some Zoo near Lisbon.

We were not the only passengers, for at the last moment a horrid-looking little man climbed on board. He was rather like a fading black-beetle, and we immediately christened him "Pasty." The officers on this tramp were all charming, with the exception of the Captain, who glared whenever he saw us, and who refused to have his meals at the same time as the passengers, to whom apparently, he had a rooted objection. His ship, he told the other officers, was a cargo steamer, not a luxury-liner. He was right. It was certainly no luxury-liner.

Pasty introduced himself to us at the first possible opportunity.

He explained that he was a Portuguese diplomat.

He spoke a beautiful, rather "precious" French, but the trouble was that he would not stop talking. He was possessed of an absolute passion for delivering lectures on every imaginable subject. If, for instance, I happened to say that I knew Bruges, Pasty would begin:

"Bruges . . . ah, Bruges, chère madame . . . cette ville si triste, si rêveuse . . . combien de souvenirs ce cher nom de Bruges évoque. . . ."

And there would be no stopping him for twenty minutes. So far as I can remember, he delivered lectures upon—among many other subjects—sea-sickness, architecture, armorial bearings, international politics, Byron, sadism, botany, Mozart's music, navigation, and miniature-painting.

The fact that one was reading, or writing letters, meant nothing at all to Pasty. He would seat himself self-confidently at the same table, and at once begin a lecture. Once I got up impatiently, and went out on deck. Pasty followed me, still lecturing. Infuriated, I dashed into my cabin, returning in a few minutes' time to plunge into the tiny, open-air swimming-tank that the engineer had kindly arranged for us. Unfortunately, Pasty had the same idea, and he plunged in after me, still lecturing. His lecture on this occasion, I remember, was on Italian primitives. I retreated under water and nearly drowned myself.

Finally, he became such an appalling pest that I complained to the doctor, to whom I was much attached.

"He won't leave one alone for a moment," I protested, "one can't swim, one can't read a book, one can't even eat one's meals in peace . . . Can't you do something to stop him talking?"

"I can and will," the doctor promised.

That same evening, we were talking to the doctor in the little living-saloon, when Pasty, as was his custom, joined us.

He began:

"Je voudrais vous parler de Paul Verlaine. . . ."

I thought we were in for another twenty minutes' lecture, and I looked reproachfully at the doctor. But the doctor was staring at Pasty with a gaze of real horror. A more sensitive person would have recoiled immediately from such a scrutiny, but it took Pasty about five minutes to realize that he was being stared at.

"What's the matter?" he said at last, "is my tie crooked?"

The doctor shook his head gravely.

"I should like to speak to you for a moment," he said in Portuguese.

Looking slightly startled, Pasty followed him out on deck. In about twenty minutes' time the doctor returned alone, beaming. He sat down, clapped his hands, and ordered a glass of *jinina* (pink Portuguese brandy).

"You won't be troubled by that gentleman for some time."

"What have you done with him?"

"Oh," explained the doctor, cheerfully, "I merely invented a new ghastly illness, and managed to convince our young friend that he was suffering from it. I ordered a complete rest for five days. How about a drink?"

Unscrupulous as was the doctor, I am afraid that Pasty really deserved this drastic treatment.

I have said before that our ship, in addition to fruit, carried a cargo of wild animals; it was indeed one of our amusements to feed the cheetahs and the monkeys every morning. It was, incidentally, breathlessly hot, even at sea, and it was impossible not to know that the officers, who were hard-worked, occasionally had words among themselves. I could understand a little Portuguese, and I gathered that the Captain, for some reason or other, was making himself exceedingly unpopular. However, on some occasions, especially when you don't understand a language very well, it is better to pretend that you are entirely ignorant of it. Otherwise, you may find yourself involved in discussions with which you are grammatically unable to cope.

One morning, however, the engineer came up with a very serious face, and asked us if we would mind coming to his cabin for a moment. We agreed, not without some apprehension; with my usually guilty conscience, I tried hard to remember whether or not I had committed some awful breach of maritime discipline, but nothing occurred

to me, although I was still indignant with the barefooted, sinister Goanese steward who scratched all night at my cabin-door begging for cigarettes. He was an unpleasant creature, and there was no bolt on the door. But if you travel on a tramp you must be prepared for worries.

We followed the engineer into his tiny, suffocating cabin, where he at once proceeded to lock the door. He then put the key in his pocket, and folding his arms, sat down opposite to us at the swinging-table.

"Listen," said the engineer, "there is a bad situation arose. . . ."

I must explain that his French was almost non-existent. Whenever words failed him, which was frequently, he broke into Spanish or Portuguese. He was, however, a fluent conversationalist, and he usually managed to make us understand him. On this occasion, however, his face was so flushed, and his behaviour with the key so peculiar, that I began to think he must be suffering from a sunstroke.

"What situation?" Frances asked.

"Something very bad. You are getting off the ship at Cadiz?"

"Yes."

"Get off before. Go to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Because Captain hates you. Oh, yes, he hates!"

"But why?" I inquired.

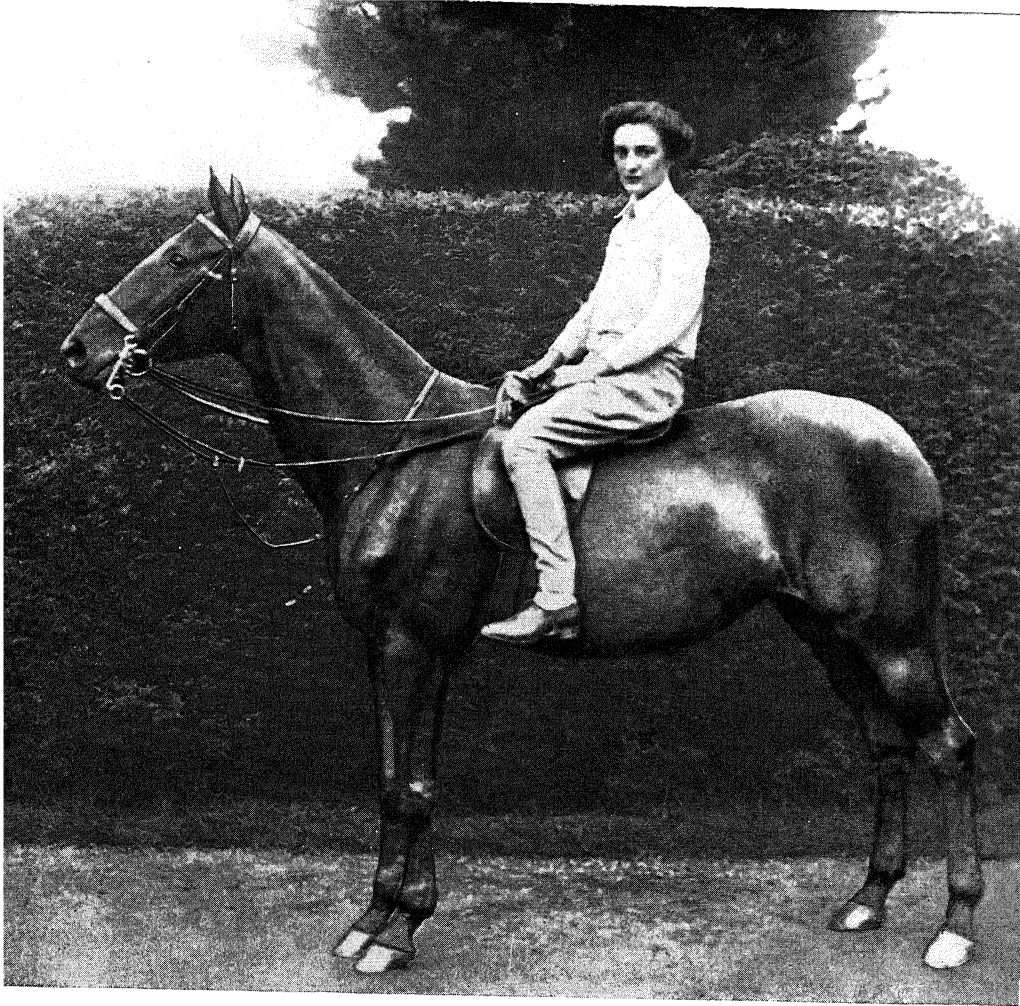
"He don't like any passengers. But ladies! Most of all, Captain doesn't like ladies. Not *any* ladies. But *young* ladies . . . ah, Dios, how he hates!"

This seemed somewhat unreasonable, for after the Captain's first few glares, we had avoided him as he had avoided us. Frances pointed out this fact, and said:

"Well, why did he ever take us, then?"

"He must. It is the law. But it is bad for his head."

"For his head?"



“ LA PATRIE ”

"Yes."

The engineer sank his voice to a husky whisper, and explained:

"So much sun makes fire go to his head, and then he acts very bad . . . he shall set free poison serpents from the cargo, if you stay too long. . . ."

"What nonsense!" Frances protested.

I said:

"Why don't you tell the doctor?"

"Doctor doesn't love Captain. He would like to shut him away."

"But he ought to be shut away, if he's as mad as you say he is," I argued.

"No, no. Captain is *muy simpatico*, when fire don't get in his head."

After some heated discussion on both sides, the engineer, still muttering, consented to release us, and that evening, after a private conference, we said, rather diffidently, to the doctor:

"Is it true that the Captain is a woman-hater?"

"So they say."

"This must be a trying trip for him. Not only because of his passengers, and the heat, but because it's the end of such a long voyage."

The doctor looked rather annoyed.

"Trying! What do you mean? Why should it be trying? Has anyone been spreading silly stories?"

After this, of course, there was nothing for it but to change the subject. We certainly did not want to make any more trouble between the officers, and although when I examined the snakes the next day the sight of them did nothing to reassure me, I held my peace.

We stayed on board until Cadiz, and in spite of the Captain and Pasty, we were really sorry to leave the ship. I shall never know, now, whether the Captain and the engineer

were suffering from sunstroke, and I shall never know, either, whether those snakes arrived safely at their destination.

Cadiz, that lovely town of narrow, shuttered streets, proved just as unlucky as superstition has always claimed, for Frances, who had been for months on the verge of a nervous breakdown, became really ill there, and the local doctor, unlike our seafaring friend, was neither efficient nor sympathetic. He was one of the very few unpleasant, money-grubbing Spaniards that I have ever met. He even hated *flamenco* music, which is rare in a native of Andalusia and, so far as I can remember, he spent most of his time shouting about Karl Marx. There was, however, little *camaraderie* about the bill he presented. I suppose he thought that he was dealing with two bloated capitalists.

Actually Frances and I had very little money between us, and as soon as she was well enough to travel, we caught a series of motor-buses, eventually bound for Seville.

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FLAMENCO

IT was, as I have said, summer, and summer in Andalusia scorches the land with a blistering heat that I have never known equalled in the tropics. The Andalusian plains were burned tawny as a tiger's flanks. The sky was not blue, but brassy, from the glare of the breathless sun; clouds of dust rose thick and dense upon the long, straight, deserted roads.

There was something eighteenth-century about our journeys. We climbed into our 'buses in the brief freshness of dawn, and drove until the blessed luncheon hour, when we ate together in little village taverns. We all became very friendly before the end of the day. We travelled with peasants, and their hens and goats; with priests, who tried to speak French to us, with commercial travellers, and students, and with minor bull-fighters. I began to know the southern Spanish people as I had never dreamed of knowing them.

One night we stayed at Jerez, in a little dingy, cheap hotel. It was so hot that we went at once to the *patio*, where a cluster of palm-trees in tubs looked rather sad and dusty beneath a sky that was powdered with brilliant stars. But this *patio* was not, that night, like others that I had seen, for every available inch of space was crowded with dolls.

They were littered everywhere—Japanese dolls, French dolls, Dutch dolls, Teddy-bears, monkeys, Shirley Temple dolls, toy soldiers, Punchinellos, and golliwogs. The *patio* resembled nothing so much as the ballet "La Boutique Fantasque."

Arranging the dolls was a vivacious little hunchback

with side-whiskers and a brilliant orange tie. He was their traveller.

We soon became friends; according to Andalusian custom we dined together, and not only the table but our own laps were heaped with piles of unwinking dolls.

The traveller was called Pablo. His father had a toy-shop in Granada, and he himself had travelled "in" dolls since he was grown-up. He talked of them as though they were real.

"Do you see this fellow here? He's a devil, he is! Wherever I put him at night, he's in the best place by morning, and he doesn't mind shooing the *señoritas* out of the way if he thinks he's going to make himself comfortable!"

I began to think less of the "Boutique Fantasque" than of "Petroushka," for the hunchback really talked as though he could, without wires, make living persons of his dolls.

"Do you see little Maria, here? Well, last night I laid her next to Manuel, who has loved her for a long time, but, sure enough, when I unpacked them this morning, her arms were round the neck of this scamp of a golliwog, and to-day it's been impossible to part them!"

I liked the hunchback. He seemed so confident that his dolls played their own drama every night, and I could not help thinking how much he would have amused Hans Anderson. I told him about our English Punch-and-Judy shows, and he asked me if I thought I could buy him any puppets for his father to copy. We parted on excellent terms, after he had asked us to touch his hump for good luck.

I was very tired, and I went to bed early.

Just before one o'clock I was awoken by that persistent bird, the Spanish rooster. I do not know why it is that cockerels in Spain begin crowing about midnight, but they do, and there is no stopping them. This particular one might have been in the room with me. His notes were hideously clear. I endured him for about half an hour,

after which I put on my dressing-gown and went out to see if he was really in the house.

On the landing I saw to my surprise, Pablo, the hunchback, in his shirt-sleeves.

"*Señorita*," he whispered, "can it be that the *pollo* has disturbed you?"

"Yes, he has," I whispered back, "I never heard a cockerel crow so loud in all my life."

"Does he prevent you from sleeping, *señorita*?"

"Of course he does."

"He is on the roof," asserted the hunchback, "through that window there. It is utterly incorrect that he should thus be permitted to keep ladies awake. I shall now go and strangle him."

Without another word he disappeared through the window, and I returned to my uncomfortable, mosquito-haunted room.

In about five minutes' time I heard a soft tapping upon my door. Cautiously, I opened it a few inches. There stood the hunchback, triumphant, the limp corpse of a healthy-looking cockerel in his hands.

I was horrified, for I had not supposed him to be serious.

The landlord had been exceedingly hospitable, and he had insisted upon us all drinking sherry at his expense. This seemed to me a poor return for his kindness, and I said as much.

"It was not to be allowed, that the *pollo* should disturb the *señorita*," declared the hunchback, fiercely.

"What are you going to do with the body?" I asked nervously.

"I shall naturally eat it to-morrow, when I am far from here."

After a certain amount of argument, I got rid of him and finally I fell asleep. He had gone when I appeared the next morning, and to my relief nothing was said about the murdered *pollo*.

We arrived in Seville the next evening. I had been there only once before, in winter, but I was unprepared for that pearly loveliness of the town gleaming like some ivory casket in the sunlight. It seemed to me then, as it seems now, an enchanted city; I have never seen anything more beautiful. We stayed at a dim little hotel that was blessed with a cool green *patio*, and at night it was as though one slept in a Turkish bath. Seville, in summer, does not wake up until dusk, and then the Calle Sierpes, roofed over with awning to keep off the fierce sun, becomes a fascinating, Oriental bazaar. People sell water, sweetmeats, pastry, ties, lemonade, ices, *turron*, and tickets for bull-fights a month ahead. Dusky urchins lurk at street corners, peddling sprigs of jasmine for women to wear in their hair. Shoeblacks sing flamenco, bull-fighters walk beside ranchers, and women still wear black *mantillas* draped over their high combs.

Frances knew some people in Seville, and they had not yet left for their summer holiday. One of them was a charming, simple man, who was, I found to my immense surprise, a Grandee. He was in deep mourning for a second cousin, and we thought that he had only one suit until, showing us the glories of his house, he threw open a wardrobe wherein we observed sixteen jet-black suits, all exactly the same, strung neatly upon hangers. He had two palaces in Seville, a summer house, and a winter house, and he had estates all over Andalusia. He was about fifty, but he seemed to live in perpetual fear of a rookery of aged aunts, ensconced somewhere in his doubtless palatial garrets. His private chapel led out of a bathroom, and could only be reached by traversing the most intimate kind of sanitary arrangements, but he thought this arrangement entirely normal.

He talked English atrociously, but loved to air his slang.

"To-night," he said, "I must eat with my fellow. . . ."

He meant that he was dining with his son.

He was a very lovable man, and his peasants adored him. They "tu-toyéd" him, and treated him with something of the easy, affectionate familiarity accorded by English nannies to their charges. It was not possible to realize, when one was with him, that there had ever been a revolution in Spain.

One night he took us to a night-club.

"If you like flamenco, you should see the people here. There is an old gypsy woman, Maléna, who is surely the mother of all gypsies."

It was his last night in Seville; he was leaving the next day for San Sebastian.

To give us pleasure, he entertained the gypsy artists after the performance, and when I first saw Maléna, I realized that I was meeting Borrow's Mrs. Herne. She was a large, swarthy woman of about sixty, but when she danced she had no age; she was the *gitana* of legend, sinister to behold. Of all gypsy dancers I have ever seen, Maléna is the most evil. In private life she appeared scarcely more reassuring. She sat motionless, sipping her *aguardiente*, very splendid in her flounced skirts and gaudy shawl. In her lacquer-black hair she wore a huge bunch of jasmine. Her rouge could not disguise the lines and wrinkles with which her tawny face was seamed, and her dead-black, gypsy eye was one of the most hostile I have ever encountered.

It was only when I addressed her in the Romani tongue that she showed the most remote civility, and even this civility was a form of curiosity, for Maléna cannot endure anyone to know as much as she knows herself, and indeed I do not think that it would be possible to do so.

I felt extremely unwell that night, and indeed for the next two days I was confined in bed with an attack of fever to which I have always been subject since once I was ill with paratyphoid.

It is not particularly agreeable to be ill in such intense

heat, and for twenty-four hours I lay tossing in a bed that seemed to me red hot. I could not sleep, and I could not eat. I think that I was frequently light-headed. I remember dark periods of hideous, flashing dreams; once again I saw the hunchback who travelled in dolls; I saw Kid Spider, the drunken Consul, Madame Tussaud's Waxworks, and, worst of all, the crocodile head-mistress of a boarding-school where once I had been incarcerated. Sometimes, despite the heat, I shivered with cold, and my teeth chattered, but I could not endure a hot-water bottle, although I soon became accustomed to the mosquitoes that nagged about my pillow.

I became so used to the fantastic visions haunting my bedside that one day, when I opened my eyes and saw Maléna glaring down at me, I was quite sure that she would vanish in a moment.

I turned my head, moaning.

But Maléna was not to be so easily evicted; she growled, in her hoarse voice:

"I heard you were ill, *niña*, and I've come to make you better. From now on you will do exactly as I tell you."

Ill though I was, I thought, then, for the first time, how much she reminded me of Laurence de Haulleville.

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QUEEN OF THE GYPSIES

MALÉNA insisted upon pouring various unpleasant drinks down my throat. Some of these seemed to me to be flavoured with toad; others, I am sure, contained a pinch of bat's blood. But there is no doubt that they improved my condition, and although I felt weak the next day, I was able to drink some *gazpacho*, some iced soup, and I was strong enough to fan away the mosquitoes when they became too persistent.

Therefore when Maléna came in that evening, swathed in her black silk shawl, a spray of jasmine in her hair, and her long gold ear-rings tinkling, I was really pleased to see her. At the same time, I could not imagine by what process the old woman's hostility had been melted into such warm affection. She soon made that clear.

"I heard," she said, fixing me with a piercing eye, "that you are of *Caló* blood."

"That is true," said I.

"Here you are in a strange land, among strange faces. Gypsies must help one another."

"Thank you very much."

Maléna sat down, her back erect and her feet close together, exactly as though she were still taking part in a *cuadro flamenco*, and said:

"To-day you are better, but you are not yet well."

"Not quite. But——"

"Let me finish, *niña*. I have some medicine outside that will cure you. You shall see."

I thought with a slight shudder of her potions, and was

about to make some feeble protest when she continued :

"When gypsies are ill, they are often cured by music. I have known it happen many times. So I have brought you music."

She opened the door, and for a moment I thought that I was once more light-headed, for my room was suddenly filled with gypsies. To my surprise, however, they were not visions; they were really there. I gazed curiously at their dusky faces. There were four of them, without Maléna, and they were the members of her *cuadro*. The singer was called Pépe, but I privately christened him Scarface. The "tocaor" or guitarist, was a black-eyed, unshaven youth. Lillo, the dancer, was, however, the most sinister. He was slight and willowy, with a knife-thin face, slanting eyes, and high, Mongolian cheek-bones. The fourth member of the party was Amparito, Maléna's great-niece, a pretty little twelve-year-old girl like a Tanagra statuette.

The gypsies stared at me, and I stared back at them.

To be frank, I began to wonder how much this "medicine" of Maléna's was going to cost me; in my wildest moments it would not have occurred to me to summon to my bedside a whole *cuadro* of gypsies. I rang the bell, and could not mistake the waiter's suspicious look as I ordered a bottle of sherry. I wondered if he was going to report me to the management for assembling disorderly company beneath the hotel roof, but I need not have worried. The waiter may have thought my behaviour eccentric, but Maléna is one of Seville's most colourful characters.

"*Vámos*," said Maléna briefly, when a certain amount of sherry had been drunk, and then the gypsies began their music.

I shall never forget my first private flamenco concert. Manolo's guitar was like an instrument possessed, while Pépe sang some of the most lovely *coplas* I have ever heard. Lillo danced alone; with Maléna; with Amparito. Then

Maléna danced alone, and I think that was the best of all.

Oddly enough, I began to feel very much better.

The gypsies remained for several hours, and when we parted, it was with the most friendly arrangements to meet in a few days' time. Still nothing was said about money, so I called Maléna back, to say that while I was extremely honoured by the performance, I would like to make some small present to the *cuadro*. She immediately became most ferocious.

"These Calés have come here as your medicine, and there is nothing further to be said. Some day, when you are feeling better, we shall have a *juerga* up at Antequera, and then you can entertain us if you want. Now, good night; I shall send Amparito to see how you are to-morrow."

I became very fond of Amparito,* who attached herself to me rather in the manner of a small puppy. She and her younger brother, Eduardito, were the children of Maléna's dead niece, and of a non-gypsy father. The old woman had adopted them, together with an ancient Romany crone whose name I never learned, for she was always referred to as "*la vieja*" (the aged one). La Vieja did all the housework, and was supposed to look after the children. The family lived in two tiny rooms at the top of a tumbledown house in the Calle Feria, one of the most disreputable streets I know. Maléna danced very late at the Kursaal, and was frequently engaged to entertain at private parties, with the result that she often did not return home until seven, or even eight in the morning. She slept until about four o'clock in the afternoon, unless she gave a lesson the next day, so that the poor "aged one" was left almost entirely to cope with Eduardito, a true Caló child, whose joy it was to spend most of his time fighting other boys in the street.

In the evenings the other members of the *cuadro* came

* I have just heard that Amparito is dead.

lounging in to discuss "affairs of Egypt" with Maléna. I soon began to join them, becoming to all intents and purposes a member of the household. Soon they had no secrets from me, and many a queer story did I hear in the Calle Feria.

It soon began to irk me that, although I was sometimes allowed to bring a bottle of sherry to the house, or some *turron* for the children, Maléna continued to maintain a very high-and-mighty attitude about money, and this although it was impossible not to notice how poor the family were. . . . Therefore, in a misguided moment, I suggested that Maléna should give me dancing-lessons, and she agreed.

Then began a daily period of torment.

Maléna was a fine teacher, but a terrible bully, and in Spanish dancing you must unlearn everything that you ever learned when studying ballet. How my friendship with Maléna endured during these tempestuous lessons, I do not know, but oddly enough it did, in spite of oaths, boxed ears, pinches, and the sweltering heat.

Meanwhile I went every night to the Kursaal, and joined the gypsies after their performance. It only became tolerably cool in Seville after dusk; during the afternoon everyone slept, or tried to sleep, and the baked streets were deserted. At the same time, once having recovered from my bout of fever, I felt remarkably well; just as well, for instance, as I have felt in Scandinavia, when the temperature was many degrees below zero; I do not in the least mind extremes of climate; I am only affected by the English damp, which makes me feel particularly wretched.

One day I took Maléna and Amparito to the open-air swimming-pool at Triana.

Maléna had never seen anything like this before, and at first she was a little worried because she could not think it suitable for Amparito to see young men in bathing-trunks. After a short struggle, however, her curiosity became too

much for her, and she went up to a boy who was showering himself beneath the cold plunge.

She said, in her clipped gypsy Spanish :

"Young man, don't you know that cold water's very bad for you? If you live to be my age, you'll be a martyr to rheumatism, and that will serve you well right!"

The youth looked at her in a very peculiar way, but she was so menacing, so Egyptian, and so plainly concerned about his health, that he feebly began to stammer some apology.

At this moment there was a thud and a splash, and Maléna turned to see another man hurl himself into the water from the high diving-board.

This was too much for her; for the only time that I have ever known her, she betrayed weakness; she grasped my hand, and exclaimed like a child :

"Eléonora, Eléonora—I can't do that!"

For Maléna to admit that she could not do something was really shattering; I could see that if I swam, I would not have a moment's peace; so I ordered some coffee and rolls, and then suggested that we should visit the famous Virgin of the Macaréna.

Maléna thought this a good idea.

"Certainly we'll visit the Macaréna; she's the gypsies' Virgin, and therefore the best Virgin in any church in Spain. . . ."

The Macaréna is a tall, majestic figure; she is exquisitely carved in wood, and although she is the Virgin of Hope, her cheeks glitter with crystal tears.

We all climbed in turn upon a chair to kiss her hand, and Maléna began to talk to her in a mixture of Spanish and Caló.

I could not understand all she said, but I was rapidly acquiring Spanish Romani, and so far as I remember, this was Maléna's prayer :

"Blessed Virgin of the Macaréna, you are even more good and beautiful than when I saw you last, and that is a long time ago, because I am a wicked old woman who seldom gets up in time to hear Mass . . . blessed Virgin, you are such a gypsy yourself that you must know how tired I get after dancing and drinking all night to support those poor children whose Busno father deserted them . . . I love you very much, and I am going to light you a beautiful candle that will burn all night beside you while I am away dancing, and then I will think of you, and ask you to see that my legs don't ache too much, and that they pay me a little more money for *juergas*, because, with four of us in the family there is not a lot to eat . . . and you are the blessed Mother of all Seville, and I will come to light another candle for you in Holy Week."

By this time Maléna was in floods of tears, and after she had lighted her candle, and been consoled, all of which took some minutes, it was time for her to go to the Kursaal for the first performance of the evening.

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MATADOR

ONE night at supper the sinister Lillo declared that he had a brilliant idea.

"It seems wrong to me," he said, "that Francesca should be the only person here who is not of Caló blood. I have been thinking the matter over, and I see how it can be arranged. . . . I shall marry Francesca, according to the gypsy blood ceremony, and then everything will be all right. Isn't that a fine idea?"

For my part, I thought it was, but I perceived that Frances looked rather troubled. I thought her slightly unreasonable, for we had had so many merry evenings with the gypsies that the idea of a wedding seemed a pleasant enough climax; however, sure enough, I heard Frances murmur something about a *fiancé* in London, very much as I had done to Kid Spider on another occasion, but without, I thought, the same provocation.

Afterwards she said firmly:

"Nothing would induce me to go through any form of anything with Lillo. He's the most sinister creature I've ever seen."

So there the matter was left, to everyone else's regret.

By this time, of course, I knew all the gypsies' domestic troubles.

Lillo had a roving eye. Manolo was in love with a young dancer. Pépe had ten children, and his wife was expecting an addition to the family.

"I haven't got the money for it," Pépe said gloomily,

"but what can I do? I so much want to see twelve children all my own, eating supper at the same time. . . ."

The gypsies could not read or write, and they seemed serenely unaware that there had been a revolution in Spain.

"Our Queen is English, you know," Lillo volunteered, "but I don't know why it is—she doesn't seem to come to Seville any more."

Once I told them about the Dionne Quintuplets, of whom they had not heard, but they were undaunted—gypsies will always cap a story—and Manolo said immediately:

"That's just like a gypsy woman I know from Triana—*she* had five sons at one birth, and they're all in the army, now, and they're all more than six feet high!"

Other gypsies I saw in Seville that summer were Pastora Imperio, a magnificent, flaunting artist, la Niña de los Péines, one of the greatest flamenco singers, a strange, sullen woman, and Cagancho, the swaggering matador.

I began to collect scraps of *coplas*, of *cante jondo*, some of which I reproduce here.

I particularly like this religious verse:

"One day the Blessed Virgin,
The little Jesus, and St. Joseph
Went with a donkey from Cadiz to Jerez.
St. Joseph gave the little Jesus
Some red berries, and
The Blessed Virgin said:
'Don't give the Child any more berries;
He will have a stomach-ache.'"

I think it was Frances who was imprudent enough to point out to the singer the improbability of the Holy Family ever having travelled in Andalusia; the old lady nearly bit her head off, and she was informed sharply that she was very ignorant; everyone of consequence knew that the Holy Family were of pure Caló blood.

Here is a verse from a love-song of which Pépe was fond :

“On your breast
You wear an ivory Crucifix,
I wish that I might crucify myself
Upon the ivory of your breast. . . .”

These songs were sung at night, usually up at Antequera, beneath a sky clustered thick with stars—the brightest, most brilliant stars I have ever seen. It was there, in the velvety softness of Seville summer nights, that flamenco music assumed a beauty, an exaltation, I have never known equalled.

Sooner or later someone would ask for a *copla* called “The Bullfighters’ Prayer.” I give it for its sincerity and simplicity. Here it is :

“My Mother,
When I am killed
Do this for me—
Bury me out in the ranches
Where grass shall grow from my body,
To feed the young bulls
And make them strong for the arena.”

There was another song of the bullfight, the words of which I do not remember, but I recollect that the hero was a gypsy matador who, when he was gored in the stomach, was too proud even to glance down at the wound, and who continued to fight until he fell dead.

At that time, in September, the first bullfight of the season was held at Seville, and I went there with the gypsies. We sat down at the *barreras*, but we had to sit in the sun, as we hadn’t enough money for the shady seats. Two great stars were fighting—Belmonte and Ortéga. It was very hot ; many of the women were wearing *mantillas* ; they spread their brilliant shawls over the rail in front of their *palcos*. When the *paseo* came in I was struck by the contrast in the two famous fighters.

Belmonte wore a suit of cinnamon: Ortéga was clad in cerise. Both costumes were plastered with gold and silver embroidery. Ortéga was slight, but beautifully made, with a straight back, broad shoulders, and slim flanks. Beside his arrogant youth Belmonte almost appeared as the embodiment of crabbed old age; he was short, and ungainly; he stooped; his legs had so often been wounded that they were twisted, and he looked flat-footed; I never saw a more unimpressive entrance.

The *toreros* came into the centre of the ring, spreading out their fighting cloaks, that were fuchsia-coloured, lined with buttercup.

The first bull was Belmonte's, and for the life of me, much as I wished to admire, his performance seemed to me competent but uninspired. The crowd thought so too, for the applause was tepid. The horse interlude, which always sickens me, caused me to put up my fan. After Belmonte had, as I say, dispatched his bull, Ortéga stepped forward with a light, self-confident swagger.

I watched him closely.

A huge roan bull came charging into the arena, and Ortéga swung to meet him, poised and taut as a ballet-dancer. He was brave, daring, and skilful. Suddenly I turned to watch Belmonte, who stood just below me, behind the *barrera*, so close that I could have put out my hand and touched him. He was looking intently at Ortéga, his face screwed-up in the glaring sun; his expression, as Ortéga killed his bull with one swift thrust, and the crowd yelled approval, was benevolent, but rather bored; he seemed to be thinking:

"Now I suppose *I* shall have to do something remarkable. . . ."

He stepped forward.

The next few minutes will live in my memory for ever, for that little, elderly, lame man suddenly transformed him-



AS CAVALLINI IN "ROMANCE": *From a photograph by CECIL BEATON*

self into a darting, glittering snake; he was light-limbed, reckless, and lion-hearted; he whirled his cape, pirouetted on his toes, and, flinging himself on his knees, thrust his great chin so close to the bull's nose that he seemed to kiss his enemy. When the time came for him to kill, he killed almost with defiance, his body passing so closely over the savage horns that it seemed as though these horns must graze him, and indeed a tiny scrap of cinnamon silk stuck to one of them when the bull sank dead at his feet, and the crowd stood up to cheer.

The contrast between the two *toreros* was never more marked than when they were acknowledging the applause. Ortéga plainly enjoyed "taking his call"; he strolled into the centre of the ring, a splendid, rather disdainful young prince; he stretched out both arms, bowing in the fashion of a tenor; his smile was satisfied and a little *blasé*, but every gesture was graceful and self-possessed.

As for Belmonte, he only seemed anxious for the applause to subside. His nimble lightness had vanished with the death of his bull; nodding in a jerky, clumsy way, he trudged round the arena, his legs appearing more twisted even than before, while hundreds of hats were hurled approvingly into the ring, and then he grinned a little bashfully, and not at all as though he had been cheered by the public for almost twenty years.

I liked him then; later I met him, and Ortéga, at a party given for some *toreros* by the Duchess of Peñaranda. Carmen Peñaranda, slim, bronzed, and copper-haired, herself boasts of gypsy blood, and when she is with the gypsies she will dance their own dances with remarkable skill and feeling.

Meanwhile, I hear from that great painter, Ignacio Zuloaga, that Belmonte, although his legs are almost entirely crippled, refuses to abandon the bull-ring. Nowadays, he fights the bull Portuguese fashion, on horseback, which

entails that the horse, a highly trained *haute école* performer, must never be touched by the bull's horns.

And so Belmonte is likely to remain what the gypsies delightedly called him on that day of which I have written—"Juanito—little Juan—patron-saint of Triana!"

Later on I saw the splendid Cagancho booed out of the ring for killing a bull without risking his own life. I do not think Cagancho cared very much. He is a typical, arrogant gypsy. Later that evening, lolling on a sofa in a black satin dressing-gown, listening to his favourite *Cuadro* flamenco, he used the gypsy equivalent of "So what?" Suppose he hadn't risked himself, killing that bull? It wasn't the type of bull that suited him, and, anyhow, he'd received several thousand *pesetas* for the fight, so why should he care?

But above this very civilized gypsy's head there hung a picture of the Macaréna, Virgin of Hope, and beneath the picture, night and day, there burned a candle. . . .

Sometimes, as I watched the gypsies, I was struck by a curious, fixed expression in their black, glittering eyes. They looked, then, as though all the time they were waiting, waiting quietly for something that must inevitably happen. Something for which they waited with a patience that was almost reptilian.

I was reminded, then, of the words of an old gypsy woman in England:

"One day all de *gajos* will be dead—all of dem—every one—and then we Romanis shall walk across dose dead bodies to Indy, where we belongs, and Indy shall be *our* kingdom again, and no *gajo* shall be living to take it from us. . . ."

Musing thus, I had been living in Seville for four months, and would probably be living there now, had it not been for a message from a Spanish friend who was in San Sebastian.

The message said, in guarded terms:

“There’s going to be another revolution, and it’s better to get out. Things may be very awkward in Seville.”

And that was how I found myself on a refugee train headed for the Portuguese frontier.

REFUGEE TRAIN

I WILL never forget the horrors of that refugee train. It was crammed with people flying from Spain, and they carried all their worldly possessions, from typewriters to living turkeys. Several babies were born on the train, and there were people fighting to hang on to the foot-boards. It was not possible to go to the dining-room or to the lavatory. One eventually achieved the latter, after struggling for half an hour in the crowd, but one could not eat; one fasted for two days—the train was a day late.

When we came to stations, we tried to slake our thirst, for the heat was so intense that we might have been living in a lava-oven; we bought tepid water, or poisonous beer, and thought ourselves blessed, when we clutched these wretched bottles. It was only later that we realized how hungry we were, and by that time there was nothing to be done. I recollect a priest handing round pieces of raw ham, and I remember a peasant woman, recently delivered of a child, who insisted upon sharing a loaf of bread with about ten people. I was able to pool my cigarettes among the crowd.

In a daze, I heard my companions talking.

"How dare they pretend it's a fair election? We don't want them, and we don't want their Russian ideas! Let them wait—they'll see what the people of Spain have to say!"

After another ghastly, hungry night we were ejected from the train near a river. Most of us had stood up all night. We were starving and exhausted. Dawn spread in a flush of fire across the sky. We were pushed like jammed sardines on

to a ferry-boat and conducted across the river into Portugal.

But our troubles were not over, for we were now to encounter the customs.

The head of the Douane was a young, effeminate fellow with wavy hair, ringed eyes, and high-heeled shoes. His suit nipped in at the waist, and he smoked a cigarette in a long ebony holder like a trumpet.

He refused about a hundred refugees, and while I am sure that he was acting under orders, it occurred to me that he need not have treated them with so much insulting rudeness.

It came to my turn.

When he saw my English passport, he addressed me in fluent French.

"What were you doing in Seville?"

Customs officials are little gods, and I have always found that it is better to humour them, for fear of what they may do to one.

"Studying Spanish, *senhor*."

"Studying Spanish in Seville! They speak abominably!"

I said nothing.

"Where are you proceeding?"

"To stay with friends in Lisbon, *senhor*."

Grudgingly, he stamped my passport. As I was gathering up my parcels, a peasant woman came forward. She pushed before her a trunk bound with knotted cords.

"Undo that rope," commanded the official, waving his cigarette-holder.

She obeyed, struggling. She was half-fainting from exhaustion. He watched her sardonically, one eyebrow raised. I watched, too. I was very tired and very cross. The official, playing to the gallery, threw all her poor possessions out of the trunk onto the ground. Then he said, puffing smoke into her face:

"Passed. Pack the trunk again."

The woman obeyed.

"Shut it."

She shut the trunk.

"Tie it up again with the cord!"

For some moments she struggled in vain.

Then she said:

"I'm sorry, *senhor*—I'm so tired! Can't one of your men help me?"

"Do it yourself," said he, and aimed a kick at her.

To my horror and astonishment I found myself slapping the official's face. I had broken the golden rule of travellers—look after yourself, and never interfere with anyone else!

Two operatic-looking policemen appeared from nowhere and caught my arms.

The young Portuguese proceeded to puff his smoke into my eyes.

"You need a lesson, *senhora*," he drawled.

"So do you," said I, for I was angry. "I know your country well, and you're the only unsympathetic Portuguese I've ever met!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to prove that you have friends in Lisbon. Otherwise, you must return to Spain."

And he stood there on his high heels, smoothing his waved hair, continuing to blow smoke in my face. I could have murdered him. But it is no use fighting with customs officials; the dice are loaded, and it is foolish ever to quarrel with them.

"Can I telephone?" I asked.

"By all means—if the *senhora* shows her money first."

Trembling with fury, I retired into a hut, and finally succeeded in proving that I had friends in Lisbon.

But this time I had missed the steamer, and was forced to travel for some miles up the Tagus in an evil-smelling sardine-boat. I arrived in Lisbon at three o'clock in the morning, almost dizzy with exhaustion, too tired even to see my friends of the Aviz Hotel—Pépe, Tony, and Harry Ruggeroni.

I remember, as though in a dream, soaking in a hot bath, but I was too sleepy to eat; I can only recollect collapsing into a clean, soft bed, and sleeping as though I were dead. I have never been more pleased to find civilization, and indeed I came to the conclusion that people who sneer at comfort are extraordinarily foolish.

I soon discovered that I could not leave Lisbon. Owing to the Spanish revolution no trains were running, and the boats were packed for weeks ahead. There was nothing to be done; I determined to discover a little more about Portugal.

With this end in view, I travelled up North, and enjoyed myself in Oporto, Busaco, and Figuera da Foz. I then went to Coimbra, the Portuguese Oxford, where the cathedral has an altar of solid silver.

I returned to Lisbon, and visited a Portuguese bullfight with Pépe Ruggeroni. Here I saw Nuncio and Siméo da Veiga, which is to say that I saw a finished exhibition of *haute école*. Then we went with some gypsies to eat sardines in a booth. A small gypsy girl of about eight performed a *danse du ventre* with a large, living python. It was all very like Spain, but it wasn't Spain, and that was the difference.

I was glad to catch my boat, after waiting for nearly a month.

I found myself on an English ship that took six days from Lisbon to Southampton. Her course had been diverted by the Spanish revolution, and she had originally sailed from the Federated Malay States, which meant that she was crowded with Somerset Maugham characters.

One man said to me:

"Your name isn't on the passenger list, what with all this dago fuss, but I know you write novels, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, do you know this writer fellow, Somerset Maugham?"

"No," said I, "I was introduced to him once, at lunch. But I don't know him."

"All I can tell you," said the man, "is that we have a very low opinion of him in the F.M.S. A *very* low opinion. A very low opinion indeed. . . ."

It was on this ship that I overheard a curious conversation regarding myself. I was on deck, just before dinner, and the port-holes of the bar were open, for it was still very warm.

Inside the bar I heard someone say:

"Lord Birkenhead writes all her books for her. It's a well-known fact."

"But Lord Birkenhead's dead," protested a woman's voice.

"I know he is. But apparently he wrote all these novels during his life-time, and decided to publish them under her name."

"Why did he do that?" asked another woman—not unnaturally, I thought, glueing my ear to the port-hole.

"Why?" the oracle repeated, in a shocked voice, "my dear woman—I'll tell you why! Those novels were too coarse for F. E. to publish them under his own name. After all, he *was* a Cabinet Minister."

"I see," said one of the women, in hushed accents, "but how awful for her, when they come to an end!"

"Bad luck indeed," the oracle agreed, "but there you are—that's what comes of sailing under false colours. And, between ourselves, Eleanor Smith will never write another book. As a matter of fact, I'm rather sorry for her. . . ."

I could not resist this temptation.

I said to him casually, later that evening:

"Some people are liars, aren't they?"

We were dancing, and he danced out of time. This increased my sense of grievance.

He retorted, heartily, pumping my arm up and down:

"Liars! Some people! I think you're very charitable! Most people have no regard whatever for the truth!"

"No," I agreed, "take my own case. It may surprise you to know that my late father is sometimes accused of writing my novels. . . . What do you think of that?"

My partner turned a rich, plum purple.

"Isn't it fantastic?" I pressed.

He laughed in a hollow fashion.

"Isn't it?" I said again.

"Fearfully hot in here, don't you think?"

"I think it's rather draughty."

"Let's sit down, and have a drink."

He carefully steered me towards a group of his friends, whereupon he proceeded to vanish for the night. I was not very sorry; I had disliked him from the first.

"What's happened to Major X?" asked a woman who admired him greatly.

"I'm afraid he had too much to drink," I answered untruthfully.

A CASTLE IN SPAIN

I SPENT only a short time in London, and then went on to Brussels, where I visited Prosper, Togare, who was working in a circus there, and some other old friends.

Meanwhile the revolt had been successful in Spain, but when I returned to London I was told that Seville was quiet once more. (This particular revolution, incidentally, was herald of the one which first put the Republican Government in power, and it was always unpopular in Andalusia, although I have since heard otherwise from people who were not there when it happened.)

I returned to discover that some of my friends had a plan for which they required my co-operation. Briefly, it was that four of us should take a villa in Seville for Holy Week and Easter. This sounded a delightful idea, and I agreed immediately. The friends were Frances, Lady Queensberry, (Cathleen Mann), and Mrs. d'Erlanger, better known as Edythe Baker. We stipulated that the villa must be large enough for us to invite guests, whereupon Pépe and Tony Ruggeroni agreed to join us. One or two other people seemed enchanted by the invitation, and the villa was accordingly taken for six weeks by Juan Lafita, who assured us that it was comfortable and modern.

Cathleen was to fly out later, but Frances, Edythe, and myself decided to go by sea to Lisbon, where Pépe and Tony were to motor us to Seville. We arrived in Lisbon to find Tony in bed with influenza. There he remained, with a high temperature, for five days, during the course of which Edythe was heard to murmur that the joys of Lisbon

seemed to her overrated. Finally Tony emerged from his sick-room, still looking shattered, and the next morning we started off early.

We arrived in Seville at three o'clock in the morning, for if the car broke down once, it must have done so a dozen times.

The party, on arrival, was somewhat acrimonious; a state of affairs but little improved by the fact that no one in Seville appeared to have heard of the villa. We finally made inquiries at the Hotel de Madrid, the results of which seemed to entail driving quite a long way into the suburbs.

Those of us who had been expecting some moon-drenched, alabaster villa, cradling a dim green *patio* open to the star-powdered sky, were somewhat dismayed by the first glimpse of our future home, which proved to be a square, yellowish erection, standing solidly in a bare and empty yard.

Blinking and yawning, we found ourselves trooping into the ugliest room I have ever beheld.

It appeared that the owner of the villa, obviously suspicious of English tenants, had removed all his valuable furniture before we moved in. He had also removed his books. We found ourselves in a room lined with empty shelves, a room totally denuded, save for a plaster bust of Julius Cæsar, a brown leather sofa, and two brown leather arm-chairs, one with a broken spring. It was all very depressing, but I was too tired to care. I fell asleep in a horrible bedroom with no curtains, in a hard, cheap, brass bedstead.

It was late when I woke, and I only woke then because someone was shouting at me:

"Eléonore! Eléonore!"

I opened my eyes, and perceived, to my astonishment, Aurora, the gypsy girl, sitting on the end of my bed. I had no idea that she was in Spain. She wore a tight black satin dress, a flowing *mantilla*, and a high comb. Beneath her right ear dangled a coquettish bunch of cherries.

I tried for a long time to pretend that I was dreaming, but when she began bouncing up and down upon the bed I knew that she was real, and I sighed. Life then seemed too hard to endure.

"Eléonore! Please wake up!"

"How dare you come here and make all this noise?"

"Listen—I want to speak to you. Do you want some coffee? I should like some, and some *pan*—I'm hungry!"

I said nothing. I did not want to kill Aurora, of whom, normally, I am fond. To my delight, she disappeared, and when—invariably—she came back, it was with a tray containing rolls and coffee.

"Do you want to do me a good turn, *niña*?" Aurora inquired briskly, pouring out coffee.

"No, I don't."

"Are you not my friend?"

"No, I'm not."

"Eléonore! Please! I'm very unhappy. My life is ruined!"

Further sleep was impossible.

I sat up.

"Who let you in here, Aurora?"

"Dolores, of course."

"Who's Dolores?"

"The concierge."

"Why should she let you in?"

"She is a friend of my aunt's. Maléna told her you were coming."

I ruminated, not without bitterness, upon the secret-service system that the gypsies have so mysteriously succeeded in perfecting. It seemed to me a pity that they did not confine themselves exclusively to the "affairs of Egypt." I said as much, warmly, to Aurora.

"No, *niña*, listen—it's serious. I'm in love, but he doesn't love me."

"What's happened to that Neapolitan sword-swallower?"

"Please don't make jokes, Eléonore! This man is not a gypsy. He is a Madriléno—a painter. I want you to ask him here for sherry. Then you will tell him what a sympathetic person I am. Then he will fall in love with me, and then at last I shall be happy. When will you invite him?"

"Aurora," I said firmly, "do you realize that there are quite a lot of people still trying to sleep in this house? People you don't even know?"

"Oh, yes," Aurora answered calmly, "but I do know them. I went into all their bedrooms just now when I was looking for you. There are two most sympathetic young men who say they come from Lisbon, and that always touches my heart, because, you see, I made my own début in Lisbon."

"I see . . . I'd better get up."

I was much encouraged to find a bathroom that worked. I became comparatively cheerful.

"Aurora, how's Maléna, and all the *Cuadro*?"

"They're very well. They're calling on you this afternoon."

I snatched a bath-towel.

"Calling on me? How odd that sounds. . . ."

"I've been studying with Maléna for three months, Eléonore. She is very pleased with me. Now, naturally, she wishes to give dancing-lessons to the other ladies in the house."

I started.

"What do you mean? She can't give lessons to the other ladies—they wouldn't understand that sort of thing at all! One of them has come here to paint, and the other's a pianist!"

At this moment someone banged on the door. It was Elsie, Frances's faithful maid and dresser. (Elsie, incidentally,

"modelled" for me as the dresser in "Ballerina.") She and Edythe's German maid were sharing the housework of the villa, with a Spanish cook and a Spanish maid, as yet, to me, unknown quantities.

Elsie's voice sounded plaintive.

"Can you come and speak to this cook, or whatever she calls herself? She keeps on jabbering about something, and we can't make out what she's trying to say."

The cook, Pastora, was a vast woman with her hair screwed up into a spiral, upon the summit of which perched one defiant carnation. Her niece, Juana, a little gypsy, cowered, giggling, behind the Aunt's formidable petticoats.

Pastora wished to know how many people would be in for lunch and dinner. As Cathleen and two friends were supposed to be flying out that day, I was not in a position to say. However, I explained the predicament politely, little realizing that by doing so I was establishing myself in Pastora's mind as the housekeeper of the establishment.

"Let's go and see the gypsies," said I to Aurora.

"Are you leaving the other ladies, and the gentlemen from Lisbon?"

"Of course. They can look after themselves."

"Eléonore—who is that awful-looking man in the hall?"

I glanced, startled, at a sinister, pock-marked face.

"I don't know! Ask him what he wants."

The man announced, advancing in a threatening manner:

"I have come about the spotted mules."

"He's crazy," Aurora declared, but by this time I had collected myself.

Bertram Mills had asked me to buy him eight spotted mules from a dealer in Seville. This man was the dealer. He explained to me that he only had six mules. I shook my head; I had been most strictly ordered to buy eight or none. I explained as much, and we went out into the sunshine, leaving him behind in the hall.

"Maléna will still be sleeping," Aurora protested.

"Then we'll wake her. What fun it is to be back in Seville! Let's buy some *turron*, for Amparo and Eduardito."

"Eléonore, will you really ask this painter to the house?"

"Of course. He can come in for a glass of sherry this afternoon."

Aurora frowned, pursing her lips.

"Wouldn't it be better if he came in later, with the gypsies?"

"I've told you—the gypsies can't possibly come in until we're properly settled."

Aurora gave a loud, mocking laugh. Several male passers-by turned—mistakenly, I thought—to tell her that her mother was blessed.

"Just you try and put off Maléna and the *Cuadro* when they've made up their minds to welcome you!"

THE GYPSIES COME TO STAY

AURORA was right.
Nothing would keep the gypsies away.

They arrived at the same time as Cathleen and another friend. Maléna wore a new, splendid dress of magenta, and sported a clump of carnations in her hair. She was plastered with rouge. Her glittering eyes were menacing. The men were dressed in short jackets, tight alpaca trousers, and frilled lawn shirts. They cleared what furniture there was out of the hideous dining-room, and began to sing and dance. I thought that Cathleen and her friends must be tired after their journey, and would possibly have liked to go to bed, but there is no chance of resting when a *cuadro* flamenco is let loose in a house, and soon I saw that they were taking an apparently enthusiastic part in the revels.

"Who are these ladies?" Maléna asked suspiciously.

"Friends of mine."

"Are they real ladies?"

"Certainly!"

"Are these gentlemen their husbands?"

"No. The gentlemen are friends of mine, too, but they are not the husbands of the ladies. They are all acquainted with one another—that's all."

"Then, where are the ladies' husbands?"

"In England," I explained. "It is sometimes the custom for husbands and wives to take separate holidays."

Maléna snorted, like an elephant trumpeting. She was in a very bad mood. Nor was her temper improved by the sight of Aurora coquettishly introducing a pale, intense

young man who was apparently the painter, her latest conquest.

"That girl! That brat! That idle, good-for-nothing little mule! Why didn't she turn up for her lesson to-day? Just wait till I ask her! Just wait until I box her ears!"

"Listen, Maléna—she's in love with that young man."

Maléna snorted even louder.

"How many times has that ill-conditioned little *grasni* fancied herself in love?"

There was no possible reply to this. In silence, I brought Maléna a glass of wine.

I was so tired that I sat down on the stairs and nearly fell asleep. This did not seem like Seville to me. My Seville was something very different. My memories were those of a dusty, sun-baked town, where one ventured out only after twilight, to buy jasmine for one's hair, and to meet gypsies, with whom, later, one would drink sherry beneath a sky powdered with stars. Flamenco music, to me, has never sounded purely beneath a roof; this vulgar, suburban villa seemed to me even more pretentious, more hideous, that it really was; the last horror was added by a party of bright young people from the Cuban Legation across the street, who came trooping in to ask if they might join the party.

"One should never come back," I said to myself.

The sinister Lillo came to sit beside me.

The sight of his knife-thin face, his slanting, dead-black eye, did much to remind me of the Seville that I had known so well, and I told him something of what I felt.

"You're mad," Lillo declared, "wait until you've seen the processions . . . and the young lady who paints is very sympathetic. To-morrow morning I'm sitting to her, for my portrait . . . for money. . . ."

This exceedingly practical point of view did much to restore my spirits.

That next night we all went out to see the *Cofradias*—the religious processions.

All wheeled traffic is forbidden in Seville during Holy Week, and I suppose that we must have walked about nine miles every night. I, myself, did not object to this, but something much worse happened—the villa plumbing collapsed. For two weeks we were destined to be without any water, for the plumbers, who, during Holy Week, were taking part in the *Cofradias*, were apparently feasting during the Fair Week, which immediately followed. In any case, they flatly refused to attend to our plumbing, and soon the men of the party were reduced to shaving in sherry . . . they were heroic, and none of them complained.

Meanwhile, the traffic difficulties made punctuality at meals impossible, and I was the one to suffer. Pastora, the formidable cook, would come to me in the morning to enquire:

“What time is lunch? And for how many?”

“Oh . . . say for six . . . at two o'clock.”

At four o'clock the party would eventually collect for lunch, and they would then complain bitterly about Pastora and her cooking. When they were not complaining about Pastora, they were insisting that Juana, the little housemaid, should be scolded for the carelessness of her dusting.

One day I was told:

“Now, Eleanor, you speak Spanish, and you must really deal firmly with these servants. You must go downstairs and tell them just how bad they are. You must say that we won't stand any more nonsense. . . .”

“I don't think——” I began, but my voice was drowned.

“The food was cold to-day—it was uneatable! You've got to make that cook understand what she's hired for!”

No. This was certainly not my Seville. . . .

“Very well,” I said, coldly, “I shall go downstairs now.”



GYPSIES AT EPSOM

I descended—I hope with dignity—to the basement, where I tried to pretend that I did not see Pastora's numerous relatives eating at our expense. They fled at the sight of me, whereupon I derived a certain amount of courage, and I purposely ignored the reproachful eyes of the two foreign maids, whom I have since been told were half-starved.

At the same time, there was something about this cook which filled me with dismay. She was so vast, so truculent. Her eyes were like infuriated black currants. The carnation stuck upon her top-knot trembled even more defiantly.

"Pastora," said I, "I have been asked to speak to you."

Pastora immediately put her arms akimbo—a bad sign. The niece, Juana, crept most shrewishly from behind her aunt's petticoats.

"Pastora," I continued, mildly, "nobody here is very pleased with you."

"Indeed? The *señorita* is quite possibly joking?"

"No," said I, in a solemn voice, shaking my head, "no, I'm not joking, Pastora. Nobody here is pleased. They say the meals are late, and cold. They say you bully the foreign maids. They say Juana is careless about her dusting. In fact, Pastora, they are all most displeased."

There was a pause. Catching her eye, which was now that of a rogue-elephant, I added hastily, for I was really alarmed:

"Mind you, Pastora—it is not I who am complaining. Oh, no! It is the others in the house. But they cannot speak Spanish, and so——"

"Juana!" interrupted the cook.

"Yes, *tia*?"

"Fetch my veil, that is hanging on the hook."

"Yes, *tia*."

"Now fetch your own veil—so. Now put it on—so! *Adios, señorita*—we will send for our luggage in the morning!"

There was silence in the kitchen, after they had gone.

Finally I went upstairs and announced, mendaciously:
"I've sacked them both!"

There was another, equally unpleasant silence. It was nearly dinner-time. I found myself unpopular.

That night we dined out.

Later, after a certain amount of shameful traffic between Aurora and Aurora's aunt's concierge, our domestics were restored—unrepentant.

After that they did with us what they wanted.

The food was still cold, the repellent furniture undusted. The plumbing still refused to function. One night burglars got into the villa, and escaped, after cutting the telephone wire, because it appeared that they had caught a glimpse of Pastora on the landing, clad in her flannel nightgown.

So perhaps she had her uses.

Cooking was certainly not one of them.

Meanwhile the oddest guests kept on arriving at the villa. Nobody would admit to having invited them, and they themselves, owing to the water situation, must have been wretchedly uncomfortable. None of them, I remember, stayed for long.

Meanwhile it was generally agreed that Cathleen encouraged the gypsies even more than I did. She turned her bedroom into a studio, and painted them all day long. Unfortunately, she insisted on overpaying them, with the result that a long queue of gypsies patiently waited every morning all the way down the street. There were bull-fighters, beggars, musicians, and mothers nursing babies. Sooner or later the sedentary gypsies would fight with the nomad gypsies, and I can only suppose that the authorities purposely turned blind eyes towards the extraordinary behaviour of the Villa San Juan.

Every night there were *flamenco* parties.

It was not long before Edythe, with her uncannily acute ear, began to pick up the elements of *flamenco* singing, and

I shall never forget the astonishment of the gypsies when she effortlessly sang a "quarter-tone." They conversed together by means of signs, and I observed, not without surprise, that they appeared to hold each other in mutual esteem.

But the *Cofradias* soon claimed most of our time.

OUR LADY OF HOPE

FOR a week, as I have explained, wheeled traffic was forbidden in the town, and the narrow streets were crowded with jostling sightseers. Once again I regretted the tranquil Seville of summer months.

But when the processions began, I was soon fascinated, for their combination of piety and barbarism was something for which I was unprepared. I have never yet discovered how many churches there are in Seville, but there must be many hundred, and every church sends forth its images during *Semana Santa*.

Thus a procession passes every half-hour. First come the penitents, masked, mysterious figures, barefooted, with tall, conical headdresses; the penitents who drag and push chariots on which are enthroned the images. These penitents wear the colours of their different brotherhoods. Some are in white, others in purple, emerald green, vermilion, candy-pink, or mustard-yellow. They are representative of every class in Seville—a great landowner will walk beside his chauffeur, a bullfighter beside a clerk, a farmer beside a gypsy. They have walked for miles, and must walk for many miles more, although their bare feet are bruised; they are sweating beneath their masks and heavy robes, and their backs ache with the weight of the chariots they draw.

The images are immense and realistic wood-carvings, many times larger than life, clad in splendid robes of velvet and brocade. They are so heavy that every few hundred yards the penitents pause to rest, and then, from windows

above, gypsy voices sing, with a piercing sweetness, those wailing religious chants known as *saetas*. The effect is impressive in the extreme. Some images are particularly beloved by the people. The favourites are *Jésus de Gran Poder* (Jesus of great power), the Virgins of the *Macaréna* and the *Esperanza*, and the gypsies' own Christ, who processes across the bridge in Triana.

It is scarcely necessary perhaps to add that the gypsies defend passionately their own particular images, which to them are living people; at dawn, after much sherry has been drunk, they are apt to revert to pure paganism; then knives are drawn, and blood is spilt, in defence of those waxen Christs and Virgins enthroned in state beneath their haloes of glittering candles.

For me the most impressive procession was that of the Virgin of the *Macaréna*.

She had many miles to travel, and although she was supposed to pass our window at two o'clock, there was no sign of her at four, and it was not until dawn was breaking that a rustle, a ripple of excitement passed through the dense and patient crowd below.

A gypsy boy exclaimed seriously:

"How like a lady—to keep us waiting!"

Then others murmured:

"Here she is! Here she is!"

In the hush of an absolute silence the *Macaréna* came swaying down the street.

She was preceded by hundreds of penitents, and she was drawn by sixty Roman soldiers in burnished helmets.

She towered, immense, majestic, amid a host of blazing tapers. Her long train of violet velvet, embroidered in gold and pearls, seemed to drag a hundred yards behind her; it was borne by more Roman soldiers. Upon her head was set a golden crown, and her robes glittered with the brilliant diamonds that had been lent to her by the ladies of Seville.

Yet, despite the splendour of her raiment and surroundings she retained, to a startling degree, that attitude of divine compassion in which she had long ago been moulded. She inclined, as though protectively, towards the people who fell on their knees as she approached; the crystal tears sparkling upon her cheeks and lashes were brighter than all her diamonds; she was not so much the goddess, as the mother, of all Seville.

Just opposite our window the bearers paused to rest for five minutes; as they set her slowly down she trembled, so that it seemed as though she were moving, and for one awestruck moment one had the illusion that her hands stretched out as though to bless the crowd. Behind her the sky was almond-blossom pink, and at a window just above the procession a gypsy leaned down from a balcony to break this silence with the strangest, most arresting of all *saetas*.

For me, as I have said, the appearance of the Macaréna was the most impressive spectacle of the processions, the high-light of Semana Santa. I can never forget the gradual disappearance of that shimmering, swaying figure; I can never forget the brilliant candles that lit her down the street; nor the stumbling penitents, the sweating Roman soldiers, the kneeling, weeping crowds, nor the gypsy who sang like a nightingale from his dark, anonymous balcony.

Easter Day came soon afterwards, with High Mass at the Cathedral and a bull-fight during the course of which Cañera killed skilfully from horseback, in the Portuguese fashion.

After Easter, came the fair-week, and it seemed then, to those inhabiting the Villa San Juan, that there was no longer any reasonable excuse for those sanitary arrangements that still refused to work. Unfortunately, the plumbers of Seville held a different view; they had been prevented, during Holy Week, from pursuing their professional duties owing to the prior claim of their religious exercises; now it appeared, as

I have said before, that the mundane gaieties of the Easter Fair prevented any concentration; in fact, we were given to understand that yet another week must elapse before the plumbers consented to accord us even the most languid professional attention.

By this time we were tired of grabbing scrappy baths in unwilling, overcrowded hotels. We discussed the matter in all seriousness, finally sending to our landlord a letter more pained than angry, during the course of which we firmly stated that owing to the collapse of all sanitary arrangements, we were only prepared to pay him exactly half the rent.

I was made, I need hardly say, to write this letter. When it was finished I sprang gratefully upon a tram, and went off to meet the gypsies at the fair-ground.

We wandered in a carefree manner from booth to booth. The gypsies were sarcastically critical of snake-charmers, freaks, sword-swallowers, and fortune-tellers. At the same time, they themselves created a somewhat unfavourable impression. They were brightly dressed, a little drunk, and exceedingly hilarious. They were flamboyantly Egyptian, and several times it appeared that the age-long feud between Romanis and fair-people was once more about to burst forth into violent bloodshed. But fortunately actual hostilities were averted.

To my surprise, I perceived Aurora outside the Circus entrance. I had understood that she was dancing in Cadiz. But there she was, hanging possessively upon the arm of her pale artist, looking far more like Carmen than any Carmen I have ever seen upon the stage.

"Eléonore! Eléonore! You have brought me good luck. I am very happy!"

"I'm leaving for Gibraltar in three days."

"Then I shall come to say good-bye to you."

Our party was dispersing; Tony and Pépe had returned to Lisbon; Cathleen and several others were on their way

homewards. Frances intended to stay on in Spain; Edythe and I had decided to catch a boat from Gibraltar.

I shall never forget our last day at the Villa San Juan.

Our landlord's agent arrived, in a towering rage. He was a saturnine young man in a jet-black suit. He began by declaring that if the sanitary arrangements were no longer working, then they must have been deliberately broken by the tenants themselves. There was no other theory. He stood shouting in the hall, and was soon joined by the pock-marked individual who desired to sell me six spotted mules for the Bertram Mills Circus. Once again I explained that six mules were no good—I was not authorized to buy unless there were eight. The mule-dealer retorted by producing six almost life-size photographs of his six spotted mules, posing them defiantly against the walls. At this moment Arturo and Maria Manzano, my Circus friends, strolled in, accompanied by their somewhat savage Alsatian dog, to complain that their contract with the Circus Brandt had been annulled, and could I not travel back by way of Paris to ask Herr Brandt what he meant by such behaviour? When I explained that this was impossible, Maria began noisily to cry.

We were interrupted by Aurora, who was in high spirits. She informed the agent that she was in love. Was he? If not, she pitied him. The agent replied furiously that he was not in love. He added that he had business to discuss, and his time, he shouted, was precious.

"I love and I am in love," Aurora declared complacently, "that, at the moment, is my situation. . . ."

I do not know what the agent would have replied, had not Maléna, accompanied by her grand-niece, Amparito, at that moment joined the party. Maléna, who was furious with me for leaving, looked stern and purposeful. Amparito gambolled beside her like a fawn.

"I am hungry," Maléna announced, "can't these matters be better discussed over a table?"

I had had so much trouble with Pastora, the cook, that I dared not tell her to prepare food for seven extra people. I confided as much to Maléna, who snorted.

"Leave me to deal with her," she retorted, tossing her head and vanishing downstairs.

Just as I was congratulating myself upon this excellent solution of the domestic problem, our party was once more augmented by the appearance of Joséfa, an elderly, ragged, nomad gypsy, who declared that she had come to discuss with me "very frankly" the problem of her poverty. By this time I could have murdered the lot of them, and my one consolation was that by this time Maléna had undoubtedly cut the throat of the odious Pastora.

But I was wrong.

Amparito came dancing into the room like a dusky elf. She scattered a nosegay of stolen flowers.

"There's food ready for everyone! For everyone!"

It was the simplest solution.

We trooped into the hideous dining-room, and ate exquisite omelettes.

We were a strange party.

The mule-dealer sat next to Maléna, to whom he paid extravagant compliments. She received them with the arrogant indifference that is habitual to her. Soon she began to talk to Maria Manzano, while Arturo and the dealer happily discussed horses. Aurora and I sat on each side of the agent. We plied him with sherry. For once Aurora behaved magnificently. Soon the agent was roaring with laughter. The plumbers of Seville, he declared, were a joke, and a bad joke, at that. Of course the charming ladies were in the right. In any case, they had adorned Seville by their delicious presence, and there was no more to be said . . . fifty per cent should immediately be knocked off the bill . . . at the end of the table the nomad gypsy woman, Joséfa, continued to talk, as she herself said, "very frankly"—

and I may add very monotonously—about her poverty. . . .

Pastora herself came up to wait upon us. She eyed Maléna with the greatest respect. At last, she, Pastora, the great bully, had met her Waterloo. At intervals people tried to expel Joséfa from the table, but I insisted upon protecting her. Later, during the *siesta*, I gave her an old dress of Edythe's. To this day, I think Edythe is unaware of this act of generosity.

The next day I left Spain.

I was in a careless, happy-go-lucky mood. I had no idea that this country that I loved so much would soon be torn asunder in a bloody war. I had no idea that I was leaving Spain for so long. I was still light-hearted when I reached the Gibraltar frontier.

I did not know, then, that I was leaving behind me for an eternity so much that I loved—flamenco music, Maléna and her gypsies, Belmonte with his spangles and his crooked legs, the Barrio de Santa Cruz, blanched and beautiful in moonlight, Jerez, with its musty inn, its hunchbacked traveller of dolls and puppets, the candle-lit gold of Spanish churches, dark, and jewelled, the Macaréna herself, tremendous, compassionate, tears glittering upon her waxen cheeks, children selling jasmine-flowers at the street-corner, a stink of blood wafted from the bull-ring across the way, the golden tower near Triana Bridge, nomad gypsies, plodding a dusty road, sleek bulls grazing upon the Andalusian plains, shell-fish at cafés, shoe-blacks, beggars, the click of castanets, the noisy tumult of Las Sierpés, in the summer, with awnings drawn across the streets.

I crossed the frontier, and the next day I visited a fair, where I rode in swing-boats with some English sailors.

I have never seen Spain again.

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